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Issue 57 Jan/Feb ’15 £6

Little White Lies

Truth & Movies

Smoke a Doobie

ROLL AGAIN

PICK A CARD

BUSTED BY BIGFOOT

LOSE A TURN

A CRAZY NYMPHOMANIAC TRASHES YOUR APARTMENT...

GO BACK 2 SPACES

PICK A CARD

MAN, YOU GET KNOCKED OUT COLD IN A MASSAGE PARLOUR

GO BACK 2 SPACES

Smoke a Doobie

ROLL AGAIN

PICK A CARD

IT'S YOUR KIND OF LUCKY DAY! A JOHN GARFIELD MOVIE IS ON TV

MOVE AHEAD 2 SPACES

1
2
3
4
5
MISS YOUR TURN
SPIN THE DOOBIE
CONTROL PANEL
MISS YOUR TURN
— SPIN THE DOOBIE — WHEN IT STOPS, MOVE YOUR PLAYING PIECE TO THE CORRESPONDING POSITION. IF YOUR SPIN LANDS ON 'MISS YOUR TURN' THEN THE SPINNER MOVES TO THE NEXT PLAYER.

Start

PLACE YOUR PLAYING PIECE HERE

BUSTED BY BIGFOOT

LOSE A TURN

YOU GET SPUN OUT, MAN. GO DIRECTLY TO THE LOONY BIN

GO BACK 4 SPACES

Smoke a Doobie

ROLL AGAIN

PICK A CARD

GNARLY MAN. YOU SMOKE A CRACK-LACED JOINT...

GO BACK TO THE START

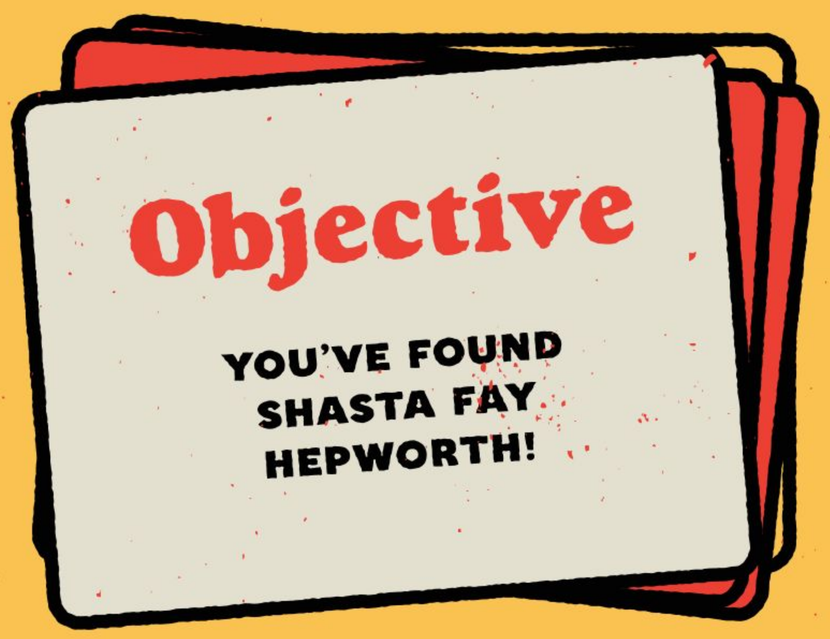
BUSTED BY BIGFOOT

LOSE A TURN

YOU STRIKE IT BIG IN AN OFF-STRIP CASINO BETTING ON THE NEWS

MOVE AHEAD 4 SPACES

OBJECTIVES CARDS



PICK A CARD

Smoke a Doobie

ROLL AGAIN

"DOPER'S MEMORY" GETS THE BETTER OF YOU SON

MISS A TURN

YOU FIND SOME COUNTERFEIT NIXON BRANDED DOLLAR BILLS

MOVE AHEAD 2 SPACES

PICK A CARD

BUSTED BY BIGFOOT

LOSE A TURN

THE GAME OF Inherent Vice

INSTRUCTIONS

FOR UP TO 4 PLAYERS

– CHOOSE ONE OF FOUR CHARACTERS TO PLAY THE GAME WITH. THESE ARE: PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON "THE DIRECTOR", PHOENIX "THE ACTOR", PYNCHON "THE WRITER", OR SHELTON "THE CARTOONIST"
– PLAYERS TAKE IT IN TURNS TO SPIN THE DOOBIE, MOVING THE CORRESPONDING NUMBER OF SPACES ALONG THE BOARD.
– EACH PLAYER MUST COMPLETE ALL FOUR KEY OBJECTIVES. THE FIRST PLAYER TO DO SO WINS THE GAME.

— KEY OBJECTIVES —

– FIND SHASTA FAY HEPWORTH
– GET ONTO THE GOLDEN FANG (PIRATE SHIP HOLDING CONTRABAND)
– FIND MICKEY WOLFMAN (EVIL PROPERTY DEVELOPER WITH FAR-RIGHT CONNECTIONS)
– REUNITE "DEAD" SAX PLAYER COY HARLINGEN WITH HIS FAMILY

GAME COMPANY LIMITED.

3
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INHERENT VICE
ACT
AREA CODE 503
057-2014
6
7
OPERATOR
8
9

what's up, Doc?

Inherent Vice

Directed by **PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON**
Starring **JOAQUIN PHOENIX, KATHERINE WATERSTON, OWEN WILSON**
Released **30 JANUARY**

REVIEW

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON DRAGS THOMAS PYNCHON KICKING AND SCREAMING ONTO THE BIG SCREEN WITH THIS SHAGGY, DOPE-FUELLED DETECTIVE ODYSSEY.

"Under the paving stones, the beach!" This was among a repertoire of graffito slogans adopted by Parisian students during the "événements" of May 1968. Its meaning: cleave up the concrete slabs of oppression and underneath you'll discover glorious freedom. Some 50 years down the line, this affirmative call to liberation has a ring of bittersweet idealism to it, an impossible dream rather than an achievable design for living. The slogan features as a prologue to Thomas Pynchon's screwy 2009 detective novel, 'Inherent Vice', and it also crops up as an epilogue to Paul Thomas Anderson's film adaptation. In both cases, its inclusion is somewhat puzzling as it sets the material in a very historically specific light. If anything, the film — and much of the Pynchon literary project — appears to encapsulate the very opposite: "Sous la plage, les pavés!"

There's a small wave of films from the early '70s which lament the loss of political dynamism following the '68 uprising. Ideological complacence and in-fighting are recurrent themes, but the question these films tend to ask is, what to do after the revolution? Look at Jacques Rivette's *Out 1* from 1971, which chronicled the dissolution of two experimental theatre troupes whose membership were also affiliates of a Balzac-referencing secret enclave called The Thirteen, perhaps the ultimate expression of the slow-burn onset of political apathy. Or Sam Peckinpah's *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* about the inexorable trammelling of an arcadian utopia and the suppression of self-reliance.

Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, too, supplants the issue of student gauntlet-seizeing to the US, suggesting that the only way to grasp onto power is through absurd public statements of primal emotion. One of the films most quickly referenced when discussing Anderson's *Inherent Vice* is Robert Altman's whimsical gumshoe picture, *The Long Goodbye* — which seems apt given the director's much touted reverence for the work Ol' Bob. Though a more apposite connection in this case would be his 1975 film *Nashville*, a freewheelin' fresco about the day the music died.

Could *Inherent Vice* be considered a late addition to this small wave? Its 1970 setting would suggest so. Yet as with Anderson's previous film, *The Master*, it's hard to say where its true allegiances lie, who it's slamming, who it's praising or even if has any inclination towards either. There's a point in *Inherent Vice* where it's commented that a Swastika

“Doc is the incorrigible hippy-freak who wants nothing more than to play Hacky Sack on the hissing summer lawn of white-bread respectability.”

tattooed on the face of a burley Hell’s Angel is actually the Hindu sign for peace, handily surmising the idea that every “truth” has its requisite, possibly phoney duel reading. Formally speaking, *The Master* teetered on the experimental, following a character in Joaquin Phoenix’s Freddy Quell who displayed no sense of predictable forward momentum, like a thousand-yard pinball, or an extended cornet wig-out which plays over a surging free-jazz backdrop. *Inherent Vice* employs a similar tactic, using a nonsense, ultra-convoluted post-noir plotline as a way draw attention away from the film’s thematic sweet meat.

The connection between the two films, however, is conspicuous. Both open on shots of the sea, looking specifically at how the formulation of water (truth?) changes when there’s some kind of human interference. In the former, it’s the swirling Rorschach-like patterns produced in the foamy trail left by a Navy cruiser. In the latter, it’s surfers bobbing up-and-down in the swell, their movement entirely governed by the briny mass beneath them as they wait patiently to ride a wave which could very well wipe them out. They also both end on shots of Phoenix’s character finding love, albeit of a tainted variety. In *The Master*, it’s with a female effigy made of clumped sand. In *Inherent Vice*, it’s with Shasta Fay Hepworth (Katherine Waterston), a character who may also be an idealised apparition, a figment of Larry “Doc” Sportello’s dope-addled imagination.

During an on-stage Q&A session following a screening of *Inherent Vice*, Anderson loosely agreed when the proposal was made that the film is simply about a guy trying to find his old lady. Love: narrative cinema’s irrational variable of choice. One key difference between the book and the film is that Pynchon doesn’t push that idea to the fore until quite late in the game, making the pangs of romance more of a sub-conscious revelation than a concrete intent from the get-go. It’s at the point where Doc spots a white supremacist sporting a kipper tie emblazoned with a crude nudie cartoon of Shasta Fay that his love for her becomes a palpable plot-driver — precipitated solely because of the jealous realisation that she’s been intimate with other men.

The film, perhaps due to its relative brevity, straight away latches onto Doc’s dormant yearning as an occupational driving force, with Jonny Greenwood’s cooing, mock-syrupy score constantly emphasising the fact from behind the softboiled verbiage. It opens with Doc in a state of happy repose in his cabana-like beach shack, waiting for his mint-green rotary phone to ring. Frisbee-eyed hippy siren Shasta Fay slinks by to inform him she’s in trouble, embroiled within a complex inter-family sting operation involving the jealous trophy wife of unpredictable and possibly insane property magnate, Micky Wolfmann (Eric Roberts). She’s only a pawn in their game, but it could have fatal ramifications unless she trades on the residual love Doc has for her to make sure he’s primed as a pro-bono guardian angel.

Talking of love, there’s an argument to be made that *Inherent Vice* forms a trilogy of films about coiled homoerotic urges. *There Will Be Blood* charted the strange obsession between a monomaniacal oil baron and a Christian pastor which climaxed in an act of phallic battery with a bowling pin. One of the more obvious (and indeed prevalent) readings of *The Master* was that Philip Seymour Hoffman’s religious demagogue, Lancaster Dodd, had fallen in love with his muse, Freddy Quell — the surreal notion that he’s able to track him down to a single cinema to speak to him on the phone and invite him to England is, in itself, unfathomably romantic. While this film invites you to focus on the relationship between Doc and Shasta, there’s another love story running concurrently: the one between Doc and his arch nemesis, the surly, flat-topped “renaissance detective” (cf *The LA Times*), Christian “Bigfoot” Bjornsen (Josh Brolin).

The jocular, tit-for-tat interplay between Doc and Bigfoot is characterised by the old concept that one couldn’t really exist without the other. Bigfoot is the scowling face of fascistic police oppression who’s out to harsh Doc’s mellow, while Doc is the incorrigible hippy-freak who wants nothing more than to play Hacky Sack on the hissing summer lawn of white-bread respectability. The irony is that these two characters are trying to become the other. Doc is a dab-hand at hard police work and

hides his natural wiles behind fuchsia-tinted hexagonal shades and a straw sun hat. Bigfoot, on the other hand, wants out of the law enforcement game, moonlighting as a bungling extra in TV cop filler like *Adam-12* and heading up crass infomercials dressed in a hippy fright wig. Though Bigfoot often uses Doc (and his property) as an outlet for pent-up rage, his actions are driven by a displaced homoerotic tension, comically depicted in an early scene in which he brazenly fellates a frozen, chocolate-coated banana.

☎

So the ball is rolling and the plot-lines pile up. Every new scene invites a single-serving character whose testimony doesn't so much shift the goalposts as suggest that Doc has, up until that point, been playing the wrong game. Love crops up once more in the case of surf-rock saxophonist-cum-recovering smack addict, Coy Harlingen (Owen Wilson), whose death has been faked so he can work as an agent provocateur for the government. The deity-like Doc takes heartbreaking measures to reunite Coy with his estranged wife and child, almost as if his own happiness is contingent on theirs. The macguffin at the centre of the film is a renovated pirate gallon named The Golden Fang which floats ominously off the California coastline. A tax shelter for a cadre of private dentists? A contraband-smuggling operation? A service offered by a druidic detox facility? Or maybe it's where the now-missing Micky Wolfmann and Shasta Fay have eloped? Its true nature is unimportant, as The Golden Fang is more a symbol of any and all corporate evil, a symbol which Doc haplessly rails against but is unable to physically reach.

The film is at once frantic and laconic, sprawling and intimate, utterly confusing and wholly straightforward. It's shot on film, which seems germane considering it's a story which exists on an exciting frontier between one era and the next. Doc as a character has no discernible bearing on the shifting plates of history. His lifestyle is set to become an anachronism and the embers of the '60s hippy be-in have all but been extinguished by the murderous antics of the Manson family and the disaster at the The Altamont Speedway Free Festival. The film's beautiful, sun-dappled final shot mounts its most tantalising mystery, a slightly bewildered facial expression which leaves it to the audience to decide what the future holds for these characters. And yet by the end, Doc has lifted the paving stones and found more paving stones. And under those paving stones, an infinite layering of paving stones. Where is the beach? Did it even exist in the first place? **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *New PTA and the first ever adaptation of a Thomas Pynchon novel. Break out the garlands and streamers.* **5**

ENJOYMENT. *As rich and strange as we've come to expect from the "late" Anderson films, but doesn't quite achieve the digressive whackadoo majesty of the novel.* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *A buoyant film about deep sadness and political disquiet, and quite the most fucked-up love story out there.* **5**

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LWLIES GOES FACE-TO-FACE WITH ONE OF THE MOST TALENTED AND VITAL DIRECTORS OF HIS GENERATION, PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON.

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THE CREATOR OF COUNTERCULTURE COMIC STRIP AND *INHERENT VICE* INSPIRATION, THE FABULOUS FURRY FREAK BROTHERS, SPEAKS.

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Phoenix Nights

LWLIES TRACES THE SKEWED AND SCRAPPY ASCENT OF THE LATTER-DAY METHOD MAN, PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON MUSE AND STAR OF *INHERENT VICE*.

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Pauls People

PTA'S SUCCESS IS PARTLY DOWN TO HIS LARGE AND LOVING FAMILY OF COLLABORATORS. *LWLIES* INTRODUCE SOME OF THE KEY PLAYERS.

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Pynchonesque

INHERENT VICE IS THE FIRST TIME NOTORIOUS HERMIT AND LITERARY SAGE, THOMAS PYNCHON, HAS ALLOWED ONE OF HIS BOOKS TO BE MADE INTO A MOVIE. WE EXPLORE HOW HIS SPIRIT IS VISIBLE IN THE WORK OF OTHER FILMMAKERS.

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Match Cuts

WE CONCENTRATE THE WACKY WORLD OF PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON INTO A SERIES OF VINTAGE, ILLUSTRATED MATCHBOXES.

GOOD FEELING
DOOBIES
SMOKING
BOOBIES
INHERENT
ESTD VICE 1970
8
QUALITY
FEATURE FILMS
INTRODUCING
PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON'S
KOOL
BRAND OF Cinema
WORDS BY DAVID EHRLICH • ILLUSTRATED BY TIMBA SMITS
BEST QUALITY • TIPPED

Still Smokin'

Inherent Vice is the latest addition to Paul Thomas Anderson's alternative cinematic history of the twentieth century. _LWLies_ met this prodigiously talented filmmaker in New York City to find out what makes him tick.

Paul Thomas Anderson doesn't know Thomas Pynchon, so stop asking. Just because the famously reclusive author finally allowed one of his novels to be adapted for the screen doesn't mean that he was willing to step out of the shadows. According to Anderson, the two of them never so much as spoke on the phone. It's tempting to think that the director might be stretching the truth in order to protect his new pal, especially when credible rumours persist that Pynchon appears in *Inherent Vice* as an extra. Anderson maintains that the two remain perfect strangers.

"I don't know Thomas Pynchon; I don't know who he is, I don't know what he looks like. I didn't consult with him on the script. That's all I've got to say. I really feel like he's like B Traven. Remember B Traven? The guy who wrote *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*? He was this kind of shadowy figure who would come drop pages on John Huston's desk. I don't even know if anybody else asked [to adapt one of Pynchon's books] and he said no. I know there have been rumours that somebody wanted to make an opera of 'Gravity's Rainbow' and Pynchon declined, things like that. But this book leant itself to adaptation more than the others."

Anderson has said that he thought of himself as a surrogate for Pynchon's novel, and the fidelity of his adaptation bears that out. Nevertheless, it's hard to imagine how the film would have worked without one crucial change that Anderson made to the source material. Sortilège is just an incidental character in the book, but he couldn't help but latch on to Pynchon's observation that, "She was in touch with invisible forces and could diagnose and solve all manner of problems." So he promoted her to narrator, cast faerie-like musician Joanna Newsom in the role, and shot her in such a way to suggest that she could fathomably be a figment of Doc's imagination.

"The spectral dimension to her character is not even really by design. By hiring Joanna Newsom, you're hiring this kind of flesh-and-blood ghost who's clearly been living in many multiple eras over time. She just has that about her, that's what she brings to it just by being there. Something about her is so elegant, beautiful, and knowing. She's, like, from another planet."

Sortilège's promotion might be the most significant change that Anderson made to Pynchon's novel, but that wasn't the only thing he felt compelled to tweak. The story of 'Inherent Vice' is perched at the precipice of late-stage capitalism, and while the film nails the book's bittersweet tone, it offers a slightly more optimistic view of the future than was offered by Pynchon's prose. Or not. "I felt like the book was more optimistic," explains Anderson. "Way more optimistic. The ending of the book, where he's hoping that the fog will burn off and that somehow, something will be there this time, instead... that's hopeful and optimistic. I think the feeling ultimately is the same as the book. And that's the trick of that book, being never-endingly pulled in two directions. It's pissed off about being sad, and also sort of bitter about being sad. And also just sad about the way things turned out, but never losing that sense of humour."

Anderson has always been loyal to his actors, and he loves to show new sides to old faces. *Inherent Vice* is only his second collaboration with Joaquin Phoenix, but Freddie Quell and Doc Sportello are such feral and fully realised characters that it already seems as if theirs is already one of cinema's most potent creative kinships. Yet Anderson insists that their shared experience on *The Master* didn't make *Inherent Vice* any easier. "You get to know each other over the course of the movie, so there's a comfort there. I mean, we were pretty comfortable working together on *The Master*. But when you're faced with a whole new set of problems, you might as well be starting from scratch. It's no less confusing or scary. You're no less insecure or searching for some kind of confidence somewhere, from something going well. And then when you do, you get lucky for a couple hours, if that, and then you're right back down to wanting to kill yourself. And then the movie gods come along and give you something good, and it's like that, over and over again. Whatever movie you made before with somebody is like a distant memory." He continues, "I think you sometimes hypnotise yourself before you start a movie and think, 'This will just be nice and fun and easy to go and make.' Which is just a way of convincing yourself that it won't be as difficult and challenging as it always is. If anything, it's about finding ways to talk myself out of doing it. That's what you spend more time doing. But we were just trying to do the book."

It's strange to hear Anderson doubt himself. He may not exactly be an outspoken egomaniac, but his myth is predicated upon a careful balance between determination and hubris. This is the same guy who, as a 23-year-old PA on a PBS movie starring Philip Baker Hall, approached the actor with a script he had written for a short film. This is the same guy who made a star-studded porn epic when he was 26, and followed that up by getting Tom Cruise an Oscar nomination for yelling "Respect the cock!" Maybe Anderson has just come to grips with his own limitations, but he's hard-pressed to remember a time on the set of *Inherent Vice* when he was confident that the movie was going to work out. "You're just trying to get through the day, or the hour, or the scene, or whatever... I'm trying to remember what it was that for a few moments gave me some excitement. I don't want to embarrass him, but when I saw Joaquin get dressed I felt pretty good. But that didn't last for long, because then you're on a set and you say, 'Well that's not right!'

"A film school dropout, Anderson is a hardcore cinephile who's reluctant to explain any sort of intellectual motivation behind the choices that have shaped his career."

"I remember having a day that was really good... he was deep into it. I remember this small thing when he was looking out the window. That was just a great memory, because it was one of those things where you instinctually came up with an idea and you just did it, and you did it quickly. You didn't run it into the ground, and you got out before you ruined something, which can happen often

happen. Like staying way too long at the party... Ultimately those are the scenes that don't even make it into the movie, and you don’t know it at the time. You think you're doing something wrong, but really it just doesn't belong in the movie. And normally scenes that do go relatively smoothly are well written and they’re simple to shoot. I don’t mean that you don’t have to put work into it, but you’re lucky to get a few of those days. And you need them, because other days will be struggles.”

Of course, Anderson has learned a thing or two over the years, and *Inherent Vice* finds him leaning hard on his favourite tricks. A hippy handshake between the restlessness of the giddily overstuffed ensemble pieces that put him on the map and the sedation of the piercing character dramas that have made him a legend, Anderson’s latest has a style all its own. But ever since production photos revealed an absurdly long strip of dolly tracks down the California coastline, *Inherent Vice* has promised to underscore the director’s affinity for long takes. “I think when you show up to work each day the goal is, ‘How can you make this just one shot?’ because when you have to edit it together, it requires way more attention to detail than you’d think. You have to match things and do it over again, so it’s best if you can just get two people in the scene talking and it can be more fun because you’re just going after that one thing. It gets you concentrated and it can be effective. I like not having to edit. If you can get two good actors in the same shot then you can watch them both and you don’t have to choose where you’re looking, you can let the audience decide. It’s instinctual moment to moment or scene to scene. It’s simple and nuts-and-bolts stuff, it usually doesn't have any larger design behind it.”

A film school dropout, Anderson is a hardcore cinephile who’s reluctant to explain any sort of intellectual motivation behind the choices that have shaped his career. Nevertheless, his encyclopedic knowledge of classic American noir was actually something of an obstacle for *Inherent Vice*, even if it meant he didn’t have to do his homework. “I mean look, those movies were familiar to me. I didn't have to go back to them at all, they’re *ingrained* in my mind. But I did get out *The Big Sleep* again just like, ‘Oh, let me remember that,’ and it was incomprehensible and that was okay. If anything, it was like trying to shake off those movies in a very respectful way. Those would be reasons *not* to make the movie. But looking at those things, looking at those devices, I brushed up on that a little bit. Those movies are in my DNA, they’re in my pocket. I didn't need to see *The Long Goodbye* for the four-hundredth time. If anything, I needed to try to forget it.”

Even if Anderson was determined not to repeat the past, his influences clearly remain his first language. And even if older movies weren’t super helpful in making *Inherent Vice*, they’re clearly his favourite way of thinking about it. Asked about Jonny Greenwood’s score, and the righteous selection of surf rock classics that surround it, Anderson defaults to James Brooks. “Have you seen the movie *Modern Romance*? Where James Brooks is the director, and he’s the most neurotic director, and after the screening he’s like [does James Brooks impression]: ‘I know they’re going to say that there’s wall-to-wall music, but I like the score!’ That’s exactly how I feel right now. I think it’s important to always be conscious of the music, like, ‘Is there too much of it? Is it out of the way, is it helping, is it okay?’ And hopefully you land in a good spot where it is quiet from time to time. But yeah, there is a lot of music, helping push the story along. But the score was a little more important to us than the songs. Hopefully, at its worst, it can just feel like a jukebox playing top 10 hits. But being able to play ‘Journey to the Past’, it's good to hear that song. It's a beautiful, beautiful song, and that's a version that's not often heard, so it was great to get that in there. Same thing with ‘Harvest’, same thing with all of it. The Minnie Ripperton song ‘Les Fleur’, which is great and by Maya [Rudolph]’s mom, and the Chuck Jackson song ‘Any Day Now’. Any time you can get some Neil Young in there is a good feeling.

“The book was so filled with musical references, and we used some of them. ‘Here Come the Ho-Dads’ was sort of earmarked from the book for when Doc goes up to Topanga Canyon, and that's a great surf song by the Marketts. But the others sort of fell away. I thought they’d be used, but they ended up not exactly fitting in. I’ve always wanted to work with Can’s ‘Vitamin C’. It has been used here and there before, so you have to get past that a little bit and realise, ‘It is gonna fit well here, it's gonna be okay.’ I mean look, there's no reason why an Asian-German lead singer and three white German guys should play that funky. Nothing that funky is coming out of Germany!”

The Director
INHERENT VICE - THE BOARD GAME

Speaking of influences... "What's that thing they take in *Fear & Loathing* that he's only supposed to take a drop of, and he ends up drinking a lot and Benny [Benicio Del Toro] is like, 'How much did you take?!' Ether? I gotta get my hands on some. And you see his face start to turn into a lizard. Mescaline, yeah. To be honest, I didn't really think that much about the drugs in the story. It was like wearing a hat or wearing sunglasses, it wasn't really too much of a thing that we thought about or talked about."Anderson may have started off being hailed as the most prodigiously talented wunderkind since Orson Welles, but whip-pan to the present and the 44-year-old family man is seen as a bastion of the old guard. In part, that's because his films are afforded a reverence usually reserved for the auteurs who first defined the cinematic legacy of the American epochs that Anderson depicts. And in part, it's because he rose to prominence just before film became a terminally ill shooting format, and has remained loyal to celluloid ever since. But Anderson doesn't seem to share the same hostility towards digital that inspired Quentin Tarantino to say, 'Why an established filmmaker would shoot on digital, I have no fucking idea.' Anderson isn't scared of the future; he's just scared that he wouldn't know how to use it. "I don't know, because I don't know much about those cameras. I know that's been a complaint, but I wouldn't know. Film is what worked for this film. I have a fear of the unknown. I've spent a long time trying to learn one camera, and to fucking stop and try to learn another one... I would have to stop for 20 years! I'm a slow learner; I'd have to go through the manual... it would be starting over. So there's that, too.

"It's an issue for filmmakers, and it's on people's minds, and I have to say that it's a lot more challenging and difficult just to kind of get somebody to show film or to print film. It's far more challenging than it should be right now, and we're just trying to keep it alive a little bit and create a little pocket where it can be shown that way in various places across the country right now."

Save for perhaps *Punch-Drunk Love*, which exists in the sweet synesthesia of its own dimension, each of Anderson's films is a time capsule, a period piece, or both. With each successive feature, it grows ever more tempting to re-arrange his features by the chronology of their stories and look at his body of work as an alternate history of 20th century America. Anderson may not see much value in such an exercise ("Fuck. I mean, that would be cool, I guess. That would be wild!"), but his films nevertheless evince an uncanny ability to recreate the past so that it feels ineffably present. *Inherent Vice* exists within a smoked out snow globe of Manhattan Beach as it was on the doorstep of the '70s, and the movie would never have worked if not for the perfect bubble that Anderson and his team built around it. When it comes to convincingly traveling back in time, Anderson swears that less is more. "I kinda grew up in an era where I started to notice that period pieces would have too many unnecessary crane shots. I was like, 'Why are there so many establishing shots of streets?' I think I kinda got it into my head that if you weren't striving to sell that it was a period film then you probably wouldn't do those.

"I don't know, I think I was just reactionary to that stuff, trying not to think about it too much. And honestly, nobody cares about anything but the people, anyway, that's all they're looking at. They're not really looking at the storefronts or your gigantic city streets. I have to say, when you don't have any money, that's where you come up with those justifications. You're like, 'I can't fucking do a street shot, I don't have the money! Why don't I point the camera at the actors and make a close-up?' Unmotivated crane shots are a sin."

In America, money is everything. In film noir, money is everything else. The true value of *The Maltese Falcon*, for example, has less to do with its worth than it does the price that someone is willing to pay for it. As *Inherent Vice* coheres into a surfer rock elegy for the things that money can't buy, it's the story's unifying concern that most palpably cements the bond between the film and its genre roots. You might think, deep into a career in which all seven of his features have had a seismic impact on the cinema and its surrounding culture, that Anderson could trade anyone in Hollywood a new script for a blank check with his name on it. Even if his movies are not always runaway hits, they're always critically acclaimed. That's got to be more important, right? "No, the dough is more important"

MOVE AHEAD
3 SPACES

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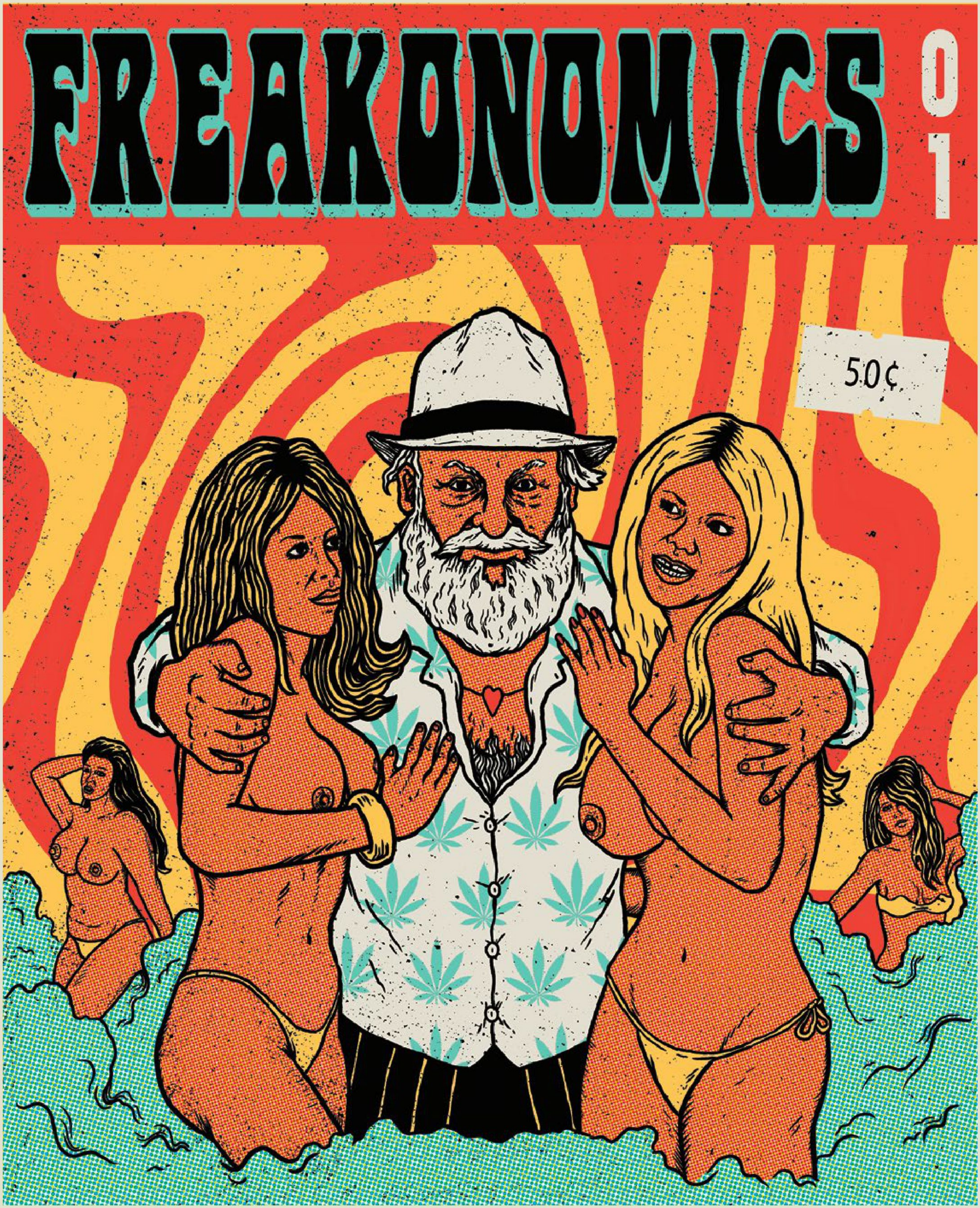
FREAKONOMICS
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AN INTERVIEW WITH

Gilbert Shelton

INTERVIEW BY DAVID JENKINS
ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES WILSON

LWLies speaks to the creator of underground comic, 'The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers'.

Paul Thomas Anderson has stated in interviews that Gilbert Shelton's counterculture comic strip, 'The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers', is one of the key tonal inspirations behind *Inherent Vice*. Shelton's creation came about in the late-'60s, initially as a film project which took in the dope-smoking travails of a trio of affable hippy freaks with resplendent and unwieldy facial foliage. By way of guerilla marketing, he decided to whip up a few short strips to advertise the film, and basic supply and demand economics dictated that the comic would live on as it was far more popular than the film, which is now lost. Shelton has been writing the Freak Brothers for coming up to 50 years, the simple formula consisting of monitoring how his heroes contend with basic functions in life such as buying food, watching TV, meeting women, paying bills and, most commonly, scoring and consuming drugs.

The thing that remains brilliant and revolutionary about 'The Freak Brothers' is that, while it deals in broad stereotypes and fond caricatures, it manages to neither endorse nor decry the funtime antics of its hirsute heroes, remaining carefully non-politically partisan in a bid to strike a more universal chord. Freewheelin' Franklin Freek, Phineas Phreak and Fat Freddy Freekowtski cohabit in a tumbledown tenement and attempt to fulfil their self-imposed status as suck-it-to-the-man libertarians, usually by carrying out routine activities while under the influence of marijuana. As a comic writer, the 74-year-old Shelton has been a nomadic soul who goes where the action is, moving around America before hopping over to Spain, London and, for the last 30 years, France (splitting his time between Paris and Burgundy). We spoke to him about the legacy of the Freak Brothers and how their wacky adventures came about in the first place.

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LWLies: Do you remember when you first got the idea to write 'The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers'? Shelton: It was inspired by the time I went to the movies and saw a double bill of the Marx brothers and the Three Stooges. I came out of the theatre and thought I could do that.

When you had the idea to make 'The Freak Brothers', what happened then? There was a local weekly tabloid leftist newspaper in Austin where the University of Texas was. I was in general agreement with their position, but I thought the newspaper was dull. It needed comic strips. The newspaper was called 'The Rag'.

Was it quite a radical thing for them to print? Well it wasn't really an orthodox newspaper. They were sympathetic. They knew that comic strips were supposed to be funny and not propaganda.

THOSE FABULOUS FURRY FREAK Brothers

(GASP!) THE U.S. SENATE JUST PASSED A BILL MAKING IT LEGAL FOR THE COPS TO BUST YOUR PAD WITHOUT KNOCKING!

EEEYOW! WE MUST BE PREPARED! FAT FREDDY, WHY DON'T WE DO A TIMED STASH FLUSHING DRILL!

I DIG!

...FIVE, SIX, SEVEN...

CHANK. FWEEESH. SLURGLE. SUMP. FWAHHHH. HISSS-SSSS

Do you think that The Freak Brothers is non-politically partisan comic strip? Oh, it probably tilts a little bit towards the left. But people did really hate hippies at that time, so those readers on the right could enjoy the Freak Brothers getting their comeuppance. See what the stupid hippies do when they smoke marijuana.

Did you know any real-life Freak brothers? Oh the ambience of the Freak Brothers comics is the ambience of my friendship groups at the time. They're not based on real people, though. I've met a dozen original Fat Freddies. I take my ideas from wherever I find 'em.

How do you come up with ideas for the strips? Mostly I just sit down and come up with them as I'm writing. Other times I'll be inspired by something overheard. Some times they'll be stolen from other comic strips.

Which ones? Well I took one joke from Chic Young's 'Blondie'. Al Capp's 'Li'l Abner' too. Capp was a liberal until he went crazy and turned into a staunch conservative in the '60s. 'Li'l Abner' was a masterpiece, though, especially its parody of Dick Tracy called 'Fearless Fosdick.' It stands up really well. 'Dick Tracy' was actually another one I loved – it was so far right and over-the-top that it was funny. I did my own did my own parody of 'Dick Tracy' called 'Tricky Prickears (The Blind, Deaf Cop).' An East-Village alt newspaper did a parody of the New York Post which always used to run Dick Tracy on the cover. It was called 'The New York Pest' and Tricky Prickears was on the cover.

In the late '60s, early '70s, were you friends with a lot of other comic book artists? At the University of Texas there was a student humour magazine called 'The Texas Ranger.' It came out once a month and we traded these humour magazines with other universities. Terry Gilliam was the editor of his at Occidental College. It was called 'The Fang.' We'd share and take jokes from one another.

Do these kind of magazines exist any more? Not that I know of. Earlier cartoonists like Mort Walker who did 'Beetle Bailey' was editor of his humour magazine. Robert Crumb is sort of from this area too. He was self-taught.

Were you? As a cartoonist, yes. I studied art for a couple of years and learned a few things about drawing. I was more enthusiastic about comic books. It was helpful with my drawing, meaning it was easier for me to create expressive, humorous figures. I have a certain understanding of anatomy. But the first thing that really taught me expression was Carl Barks' 'Donald Duck.' Such great drawing. He went right back to the '40s and '50s and was an amazingly talented comic book writer. Disney didn't allow its artists to

"I've never been able to read a Marvel comic all the way through."

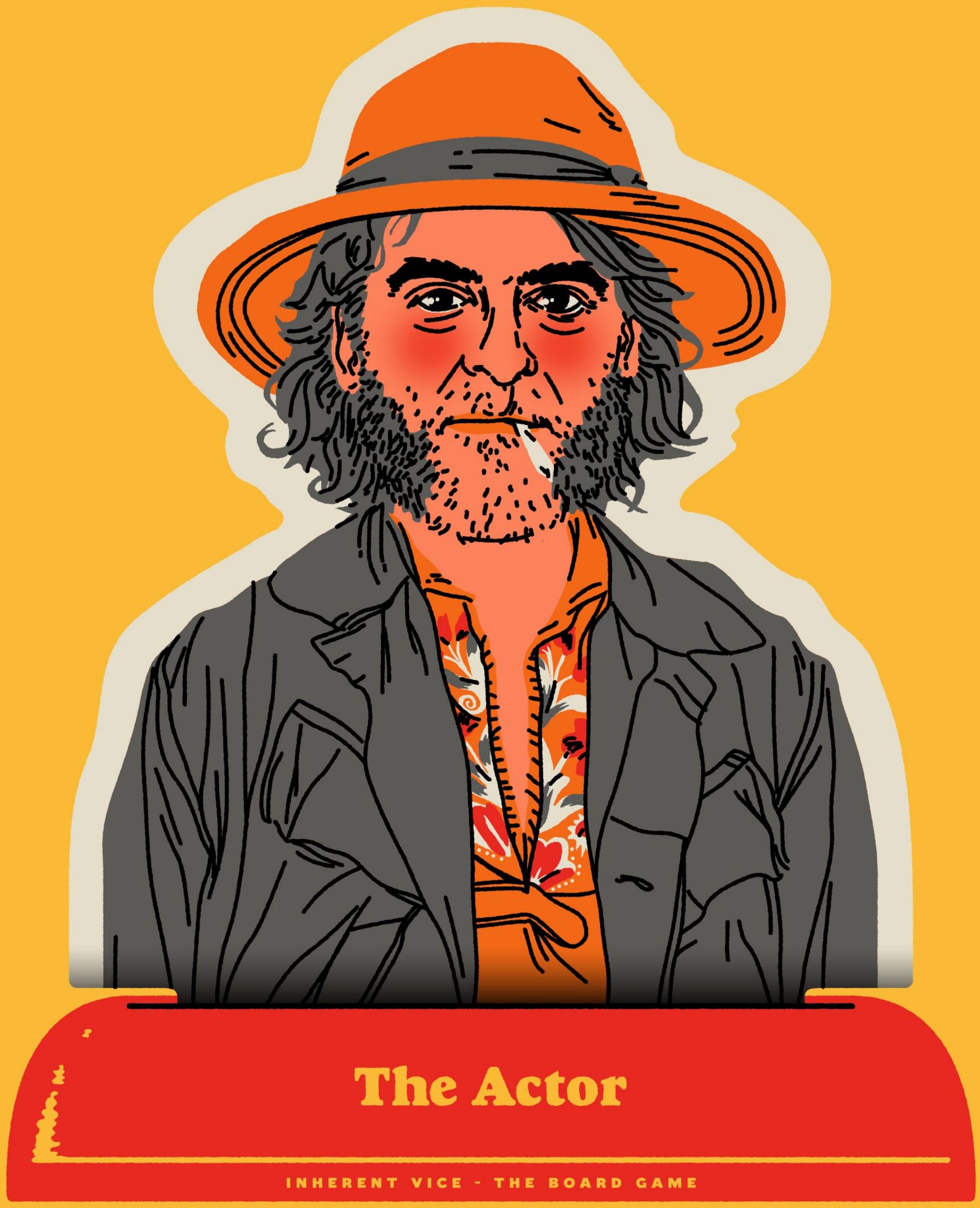
sign their names on each strip, but you could tell which ones were done by Barks. Walt Kelly, another famous cartoonist, did 'Pogo Possum' for Disney, and he drew some beautiful Donald Duck covers. The drawing for 'Pogo Possum' eventually got so rich and detailed that I could barely read it. It's considered one of the American classics.

Were the Freak Brothers ever inspired by the news? Yes, but then but I realised that sort of humour doesn't last. We went for things that were not topical so they could be translated into other languages. I tried to quit using names and terms that were specific to places and times. The jokes had to work on their own.

One thing that makes the Freak Brothers so great is that there's a perfect balance between image and text. I've got some rules. I always try to avoid more than three lines of text. I imagine sometimes teaching how to draw comics, and I think the most important thing is clarity. I've never been able to read a Marvel comic all the way through. They're so wordy and uninteresting.

Did you ever get in trouble with the authorities? The way the American system works is that the first ones to be persecuted are the bookstore owners. The second are the distributors, third are the publishers, and then the last is the artist. I never had any trouble like that. There was aninstance of an art gallery owner hosting an exhibition of work by Robert Crumb and Clay Wilson, which was clearly obscene. It was all taken from their 'Snatch Comics' series. The cops came and confiscated the artwork and all the books they were selling. The owner of the gallery, Si Lowinski, was involved in some kind of legal action, and it went to court. In California, they don't have any law against obscenity, only pornography. And the definition of pornography was that he had to be of prurient interest, and no-one on the jury would admit to being sexually aroused by it

Comic strip printed with kind permission from Knockabout Publishing (www.knockabout.com). 'The Freak Brothers Omnibus', 'The Fat Freddy's Cat Omnibus', 'The Best of Wonder Wart-Hog' and 'Not Quite Dead' by Gilbert Shelton are all available now.


The Actor
INHERENT VICE - THE BOARD GAME

Phoenix Nights

WORDS BY ADAM NAYMAN
ILLUSTRATED BY TIMBA SMITS

The actor formerly known as Leaf has grown into one of cinema's foremost screen artists. PTA collaborations aside, *LWLies* argues there was an intense, dark side visible from the very beginning.

During the 2014 New York Film Festival press conference for *Inherent Vice*, Joaquin Phoenix sat quietly at the far left side of the stage next to Paul Thomas Anderson, and let the rest of the movie's vast ensemble cast do the talking about Thomas Pynchon and whatever else. In fact, at several points, Phoenix's reluctance to say anything about a film in which he plays the leading role became a source of fun for his co-stars. "Joaquin, do you want to weigh in on this," prodded Owen Wilson, only to be met by stony silence; a little later on, after a game of pass-the-mic that made its way down the line of nearly a dozen other performers — from veterans like Martin Short and Benicio Del Toro to newcomer Katherine Waterston — the actor once again begged off, folding his arms and nodding vaguely in his director's direction.

Phoenix's closed-off posture could be taken equally as a sign of arrogance or inhibition. After 20 years of featured roles in American movies and at the tender age of 40, the Puerto-Rican born actor has established a cult of personality that's at once recklessly self-obsessed and painfully self-effacing — a mirror, perhaps, of the polarising extremes that define his greatest screen performances.

It is perhaps tempting to read Phoenix's current reticence to discuss his work as a by-product of his collaboration with Anderson, and not only because his role as Freddie Quell in *The Master* — a splayed bundle of nerves, dangerously exposed and white-hot to the touch — seemed to emanate from a core of discomfort beyond technical matters like line readings. Like his peer Anderson (who is four years his senior), Phoenix emerged in the seemingly halcyon days of the mid-'90s, when American independent cinema — at least the post-Quentin Tarantino version — was in its heyday; like Anderson, he's drawn the brickbats of critics and commentators for running his mouth, although

whereas the filmmaker's public pronouncements about his greatness could be written off to youthful hubris, Phoenix's "retirement" from acting in 2008 and subsequent re-invention as a bearded white-boy rapper felt at the time — and were eventually revealed to be — an Andy Kaufman-esque stunt in public personality modification.

Whatever one thinks of *I'm Still Here*, the 2010 pseudo-documentary that Phoenix co-wrote with Casey Affleck and starred in as a comically oblivious version of himself — including footage of his infamous appearance on *Late Night With David Letterman* — it proves that Phoenix's mystique is genuine: how many other 21st century stars have cultivated the sort of personal and professional ambiguity that would make this kind of extended publicity stunt possible? Around the time of *Gladiator*, Phoenix was merely a gifted up-and-coming actor in demand by savvy mainstream filmmakers; his early patrons included Gus Van Sant, who shrewdly exploited his limpidity as a thrill-killer in 1995's *To Die For* and M Night Shyamalan, who used him smartly as an overgrown high-school burnout in 2002's *Signs* and a flummoxed young lover in 2004's *The Village*. By the time of *Walk the Line*, rumours that Phoenix was a kind of Method inheritor to the Brando mantle, immersing himself in roles to the point of self-destruction — including a stint in rehab around the same time he played Johnny Cash — reconfigured his reputation.

The filmmaker who has got the most out of Phoenix over the years is James Gray, using him as a petty hood opposite Mark Wahlberg in 2000's *The Yards* and who then gave him three great roles in a row: a nightclub-impresario-turned-cop in 2007's *We Own the Night*; a desperately infatuated loner in 2009's *Two Lovers* and a turn-of-the-century pimp in 2013's *The Immigrant*. Gray's earnest commitment to drama and detailed characterisation provide Phoenix with just the right steely undergirding for his fragile acting style; when his Bobby Green enters a Queens crackhouse wearing a wire in *We Own the Night*, the actor looks like he's going to fly apart at the seams. Sadly, his brilliant work in *Two Lovers* as a man whose only slightly requited devotion to a beautiful neighbour is a form of self-abuse was overshadowed by antics connected to *I'm Not There*; instead of announcing Phoenix's arrival as a pantheon actor, it became a footnote to his tabloid celebrity — exactly the sort of negative media attention that he and Affleck had claimed they were trying to critique.

It would seem that Gray has forgiven his friend; *The Immigrant* gains immeasurably from Phoenix's calculatedly uneven performance, which mutates from shadowy, one-note villainy to an unrestrained anguish that evokes Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront* (and the crowning scene takes place not far from the dockside). His wracked acting in *The Master* suggested Daniel Day-Lewis (because they currently stand side by side, despite the disparities in their ages, as 'event movie stars'). A case in point would be Spike Jonze's *Her*, which doubled down on Phoenix's unwieldy aura; he's in nearly every shot of the film, and his impenetrable sadness is like a wall that his agile co-stars (including a disembodied Scarlett Johansson) keep bouncing off of.

As impressive as Phoenix is in *The Master* (and to a lesser extent *Her*), there's something unsettling about seeing movies carefully engineered from the top-down in misfit image. Dismiss *Walk the Line* as boiler plate Hollywood product if you want, but Phoenix's accomplishment in that film is to disappear fully into the skin of an artistic icon without ever lapsing into mere imitation; it's a shame he lost the Oscar to his *The Master* co-star Philip Seymour Hoffman, whose approximation of Truman Capote was more pyrotechnical and ultimately less convincing. Phoenix and Hoffman were amazing together because their roles countenanced energetically vivid acting, but at this point it's worth asking how much further Phoenix can stylise his voice and body (cf his dithering drone and clenched comportment in *Her*) before he starts to seem like a caricature of an adventurous actor.

Inherent Vice, which places him at the centre of a swirling sea of eccentrics, might suggest a solution, which is to surround Phoenix with figures even more unhinged than he is — a way of leveling the playing field. But it's hard to imagine a film where he wouldn't still stand apart — the price and the glory of being the most idiosyncratic major actor of his generation

A GAME OF FUN

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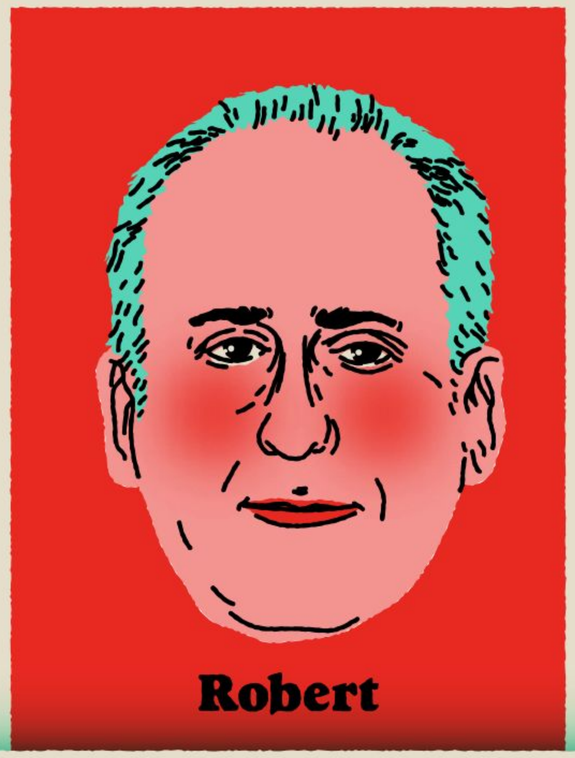
The Anderson Tapes

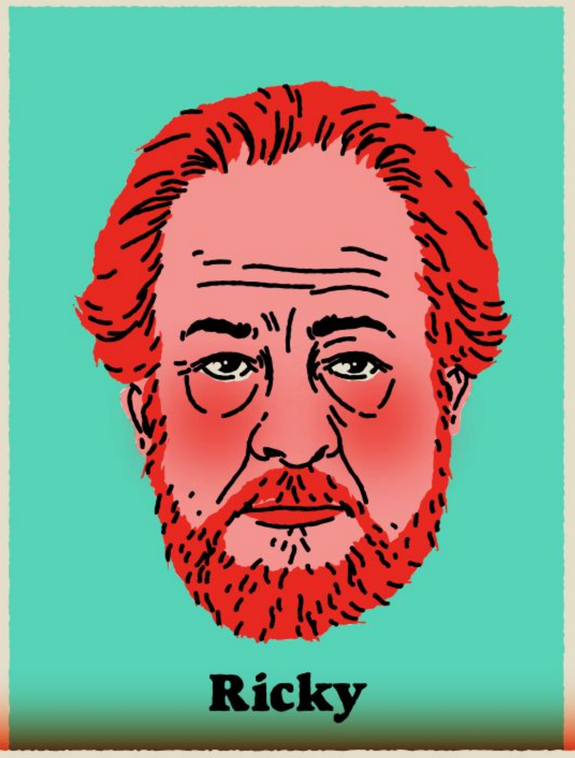
A weekend of movies by Paul Thomas Anderson

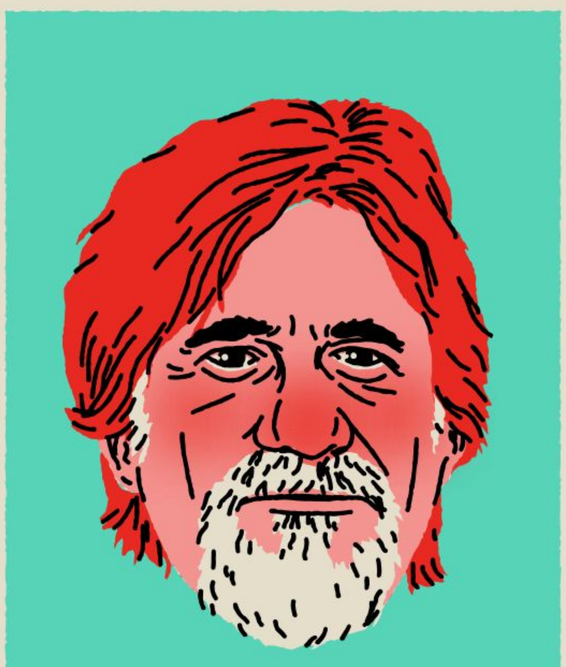
To celebrate the release of *Inherent Vice*, a sun-baked stoner odyssey based on the 2009 novel by Thomas Pynchon, ICA and LWLies have joined forces to present a selection of rare 35mm prints from PTA's bountiful back catalogue:

Hard Eight
Boogie Nights
Magnolia
Punch Drunk Love
There Will Be Blood
The Master

All screenings will include bespoke introductions by the LWLies team







PAUL'S PEOPLE
THE GUESS-WHO GAME

PAUL'S PEOPLE

ILLUSTRATED BY
TIMBA SMITS

All filmmakers tend to project themselves as a singular force of nature, and Paul Thomas Anderson is no different. Yet, despite the dictates of the auteur theory, it helps to surround oneself with exemplary collaborators who work on the same creative frequency. *LWLies* profiles some of the people who have helped bring PTA's wild visions into fruition.

Melora Walters

ACTOR

Paul Thomas Anderson recycles too many of his favourite actors for any one of them to be singled out as his good luck charm, but if Philip Baker Hall and John C Reilly are the faces of Anderson's first three features, Melora Walters might just be their wounded soul. Arm candy in *Hard Eight*, a porn star wife in *Boogie Nights* and a tailspinning daughter in *Magnolia*, the mousy actress took a trio of small roles and ripped them away from the men who might have defined them. Combining the vulnerability of an exposed nerve with the kind of eyes that have clearly seen a few too many things, Walters approaches her characters like they're in the middle of a nervous breakdown that it's her job to hide. Her performance in *Magnolia* as Claudia Wilson Gater is a perfect personification of the nervous, heart-outside-the-chest energy that defined Anderson's early work — to this day, Walters is the only actor who makes it feel as though Anderson's camera was taking its cues from her. **DAVID EHRLICH**

Jack Fisk

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Though most commonly associated with the films of Terrence Malick — having worked on every single one of his feature films to date — production design maestro and world-builder Jack Fisk has made a late play for the annals of greatness by adding Anderson to his roster of regular collaborators (the other biggie being David Lynch). Working closely with art director David Crank on *The Master* and *There Will Be Blood* (Crank took solo production design detail on *Inherent Vice*), Fisk's immaculate work is tough to critique by dint of the fact that for it to be successful, it needs to be subtle enough not to draw attention away from the actors and the direction, and pronounced enough to provide a satisfying spatial context for the drama. His most iconic work is in Malick's *Days of Heaven*, specifically the quasi-gothic farmhouse which sits ominously amid the wheatfields of the Texas Panhandle, and his later work on *The Master* brilliantly referenced that early mastery, whisking up '50s middle-America with zero recourse to theme park-attraction cliché. **DAVID JENKINS**

Jonny Greenwood

COMPOSER

Inherent Vice is the third Anderson score composed by Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood following *There Will Be Blood* and *The Master*. It's hard to imagine a loftier meeting of creative forces. Anderson told *Entertainment Weekly* how he chanced upon Greenwood's inaugural score for a documentary feature: "I saw *Bodysong* at a film festival in Rotterdam on a rainy afternoon... I just fell in love." In the same dual interview, Greenwood relayed an email sent from the director: "I've got complete trust that what you do is going to be great." This faith was repaid to the tune of a jangly yet ethereal soundtrack incorporating dark strings and harmonising with Anderson's heady homebrew of idiosyncratic classicism. Greenwood is drawn to dramas where music can enhance an ambience of psychological complexity. *Norwegian Wood* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* are his only film composer gigs beyond Anderson. He also strives to emulate some aspect of the period setting. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

Luis Guzman

ACTOR

Few character actors have been as prolific or reliable over the past two decades as Luis Guzmán. By the time Anderson cast him in his 1997 film *Boogie Nights*, Guzman had already amassed a staggering 45 film and television credits, but it was his memorable turn as open-shirted club owner and aspiring porn star Maurice TT Rodriguez that arguably had the biggest single impact on his career. For one thing the Puerto Rican actor, who earned his break on *Miami Vice* and *The Equalizer* in the mid '80s, became a semi-regular fixture in Anderson's films, subsequently appearing in *Magnolia* and *Punch-Drunk Love*. But Anderson is not the only acclaimed filmmaker to have recognised the greatness of The Guzmán — Brian De Palma, Steven Soderbergh and Richard Linklater have cast him on a combined six occasions. *The Boogie Nights* DVD is worth buying for Guzmán's deleted scenes alone. **ADAM WOODWARD**

Robert Elswit

CINEMATOGRAPHER

The story of Paul Thomas Anderson is also the story of cinematographer Robert Elswit. Involved with much TV-movie filler during the '80s and early '90s (his most notably early credit being Stephen Gyllenhaal's 1991 Dennis Hopper vehicle, *Paris Trout*), his career received a much-needed kick-start with collaboration on Anderson's debut feature, *Hard Eight*. Shooting Las Vegas should be a gift for a cinematographer, and Elswit captures Sin City in a way that emphasises its crepuscular

Paul

DIRECTOR

PAUL'S PEOPLE

THE GUESS-WHO GAME

beauty without undue romanticisation. He drew on classic putting-on-a-show movies like *42nd Street* and *The Gold Diggers of 1933* for the making of *Boogie Nights*, a film which his wife, Helen, advised him not to do. With Anderson, Elswit gets the opportunity to shoot on celluloid and use all manner of strange lenses. In a 2011 interview, he explained that his work is to try and make sure that a sense of vitality and and a desire for happy accidents on set are included within the pristine images he produces. **DAVID JENKINS**

Jon Brion

COMPOSER

Before hooking up with Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood on 2007's *There Will Be Blood*, Anderson's films were exclusively scored by American music producer and composer Jon Brion. This fruitful collaboration, beginning with *Hard Eight* and seemingly ending with *Punch-Drunk Love*, resulted in four distinctly different scores, each demonstrating Brion's encyclopedic knowledge of music theory as well as his flair for arrangement and instrumentation. What you might not know, is that in late 1999 Anderson shot a pilot for a VH1 variety show entitled 'The Jon Brion Show' — such was his admiration for his long-term creative partner. Sadly, the show never made it to air, but Anderson believed in the project so much that he helmed three whole episodes. The pilot, which features a special guest appearance from Elliott Smith, is currently available to view on Anderson's YouTube channel, Al Rose Productions. **ADAM WOODWARD**

A GAME OF FUN

FOR 2 PLAYERS

Ricky Jay

ACTOR

"This cannot be 'One of Those Things...'. This, please, cannot be that. Thiswas not just a matter of chance. These strange things happen all the time." So ends the curious opening voiceover of *Magnolia*, Anderson's preamble spanning three tales of impossible coincidence in order to set the stage for an epic film that taps into the unknown folds of our world, using happenstance and a hail of frogs to expose the secret blueprints of fate. And who better to help us bridge the gap between the things we can see and the things we choose to accept than famed mentalist Ricky Jay, whose disaffected monotone is that of a man who knows just a little more than he can tell you. Like *Magnolia* itself, Jay is at once both comforting and impossible to solve, and Anderson's decision to include him in the film (both off and on camera) is so unspeakably perfect that it just cannot be One of Those Things. **DAVID EHRLICH**

Cassandra Kulukundis

CASTING DIRECTOR

While it's hard to pinpoint where a casting director's work ends and a director's begins, evidence of Cassandra Kulukundis' worth as a collaborator can be found in her ubiquity. Ever since *Boogie Nights*, she has been one of Paul's regular people. In an interview with *deadline.com*, Kulukundis explained that a part of carrying out her boss' vision is the marriage of star names with newcomers. Casting for Anderson is apparently like "building a quilt." Kulukundis brings her own passion and industry awareness to the table where opportune. Katherine Waterston who plays Shasta Fay is an actress she has been watching for a while. Elsewhere, she is a big wheel in the distribution and production company, Unison Films, founded by her brother, Emanuel Michael. Recently, the siblings co-produced all three incarnations of Ned Benson's *The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby*. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

Joaquin

ACTOR

Dylan Tichenor

EDITOR

It's easy to see why editor Dylan Tichenor is now a firm fixture in the Anderson first XI, as he worked his way up the film industry ladder from a series of early collaborations with Anderson muse, Robert Altman. While he wasn't a fully-fledged editor when working on *Short Cuts*, *Kansas City* and *The Player*, this first hand experience of marshalling sprawling, multi-strand social frescos likely made him an appealing creative associate. The Altman-connection seems key, as when Anderson shifted away from making films with unabashedly pronounced cinematic antecedent (Martin Scorsese is another perma-dropped name in criticism of Anderson's early work), his specific use for Tichenor also waned. *The Master* and *Inherent Vice* were edited by Leslie Jones (*The Thin Red Line*), while Tichenor went on to edit movies (*Zero Dark Thirty*, *Lawless*) with the agile pacing of those beloved early PTAs. **DAVID JENKINS**

The GAME OF PYNCHON

A GAME OF CLUES AND SINISTER

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FOR 2 TO 6 PLAYERS

FOR ALL AGES

ON

ESQUE

INFLUENCES

HOW TO PLAY

PYNCHONESQUE

WORDS BY VADIM RIZOV. ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES WILSON

‘*Inherent Vice*’ is the first Thomas Pynchon novel to be directly adapted for the screen, but *LWLies* argues that there are other films where his anarcho-comic spirit can be seen.

The Thomas Pynchon Project, recontextualised in all his novels: the West in general, specifically the United States, suffers from systematic repression and redirection of all good liberal instincts and progressive drives. Noting how freaks and free souls are repeatedly marginalised, two potential explanations occur to any semi-alert citizen: there may be some kind of massive conspiracy afoot, one briefly perceptible through clues and sinister influences that can never be articulated, isolated or effectively combated. The other possibility is that there’s no conspiracy afoot and entropy is the only force driving society. There’s either an awful explanation for everything or no explanation at all. Both possibilities are equally dispiriting and terrifying.

The most succinct expression of this either/or conundrum is in Pynchon’s shortest novel, 1966’s ‘The Crying of Lot 49’. Protagonist Oedipa Maas becomes convinced there may be an underground postal service — a modest proposition, but such an organisation’s existence hints at more and more possible subterranean realities, malevolent or otherwise. She never figures out which possibility is correct. The most expansive maybe-conspiracy is in 1997’s ‘Mason & Dixon’, where the project of mapping the American continent is the first step in top-down control — cartographical lines and numbers limit the new continent’s possibilities, the reasons for the title characters’ expedition remaining shadowy and potentially attributable to any number of mysterious patrons.

Oliver Stone might be a good fit for the presumably impossible project of a Pynchon adaptation. At the time of *JFK*’s release in 1991, Stone contended he didn’t necessarily believe everything on-screen — ie, that a shadowy cabal of Cubans, Texan good ol’-boys and various CIA malcontents came together to kill a president and only one honest district attorney could piece their plot together.

Instead, Stone claimed to be operating in the spirit of "countermyth": assembling all the fragmentary conspiracies surrounding a traumatic event, then throwing them at the wall and seeing what stuck. This is a good fit for the Pynchon project, which fantasises embellishments and alternate explanations to very real traumas in American history.

Yet Stone has since dropped the mask: he now claims that *JFK* represents his reasoned historical reconstruction of what happened. This kind of delusional diagnosis, entrancing though it is to watch, is the opposite of Pynchon's playful mosaic of deep-research detail which alternates with nonsense and lots of songs: the author is never so committed to one line of argument that he can't find lots of time to get off-track, and he'd never suggest that what he's unearthed is the suppressed truth. Perhaps a closer counterpart might be Jacques Rivette, who repeatedly suggested shadowy, impossible-to-pin-down and sinister undercurrents from his very first feature, 1961's *Paris Belongs to Us*, a vague conspiracy in search of a resolution that never comes. Rivette's love of tangents manifests itself in different ways, often in the spectacle of actors rehearsing or improvising themselves into new situations, the no-endgame musings of 10-hour 1971 opus, *Out 1*, or the exquisite corpse nature of 1974's *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, in which both women's reactions to the fantasy they're seeing create diversions in the narrative.

For all his formidable erudition, depth of historical knowledge and commitment to structural innovation, Pynchon's own taste in film seems to veer towards classic Hollywood. This would be the logical byproduct of being born in the '30s, at a time when mass movie-going on a regular basis was common. (It is necessary to speculate and invent plausible mythologies in the absence of hard biographical data, which seems appropriate.) More specifically, it's evident and fairly well-documented that Pynchon spent a good portion of his life watching TV for hours and hours. Like many Americans who had a TV in the '50s through '70s, his easiest reference points are whatever was on the tube, and that leads inevitably back to the semi-heterogeneous sprawl of classic Hollywood. That grounding's already there in his first novel 'V', from 1963, which describes a man's taste in clothing as leaning towards "George Raft suits." Not a passive source of amusement, mass media shapes our self-image as well: character Rachel Owlglass theorises that women get nose surgery because "the hook nose is traditionally the sign of the Jew and the retroussé nose the sign of the WASP or White-Anglo-Saxon Protestant in the movies and advertisements."

It's television more than cinema that's ever-present in Pynchon's later contemporary novels 'Vineland' and 'Inherent Vice' — more precisely, movies as seen and constantly re-remembered through random television exposure. In 'Lot 49', Oedpia Maas watches a nightmarish pastiche of sticky-sweet MGM-ish war movie fare, *Cashiered* ("starring Baby Igor"), "about this kid and his father, who's drummed out of the British Army for cowardice, only he's covering up for a friend, see." This is classic Hollywood as a series of infinitely recombinable signifiers (also perhaps one source of inspiration for the myriad song-lyric transcriptions which interrupt his narratives); in 'Inherent Vice' the reference points are more definite. Entering the house of missing millionaire Mickey Wolfmann, private detective Doc Sportello sees his wife "exactly inside a flattering convergence of lights that made her look like some contract star of the grand studio era." The house lighting, it turns out, was done by James Wong Howe, and Sloane rhapsodises over its moodiness: "instead of hard-edged lamp reflections there's this glow, this purity, almost as if it's coming from inside."

Such precise allusions suggest a way in which regular deep immersion into cinematic history becomes its own variety of conspiratorial endeavour. An active, enthused viewer tries to forge connections between different movies — obvious links between works sharing directors or actors with strong mythological personalities, but also more tenuous associations between shared incidents, similar points of view, zeitgeist-y convergence and so on. Teasing out these potential links is itself an act of conspiracy, the act of seeing connections where none might exist. That's not paranoia: that's perception, and watching movies makes alert paranoiacs out of those who care to indulge the instinct

A GAME OF FUN

MOVE AHEAD
2 SPACES

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—

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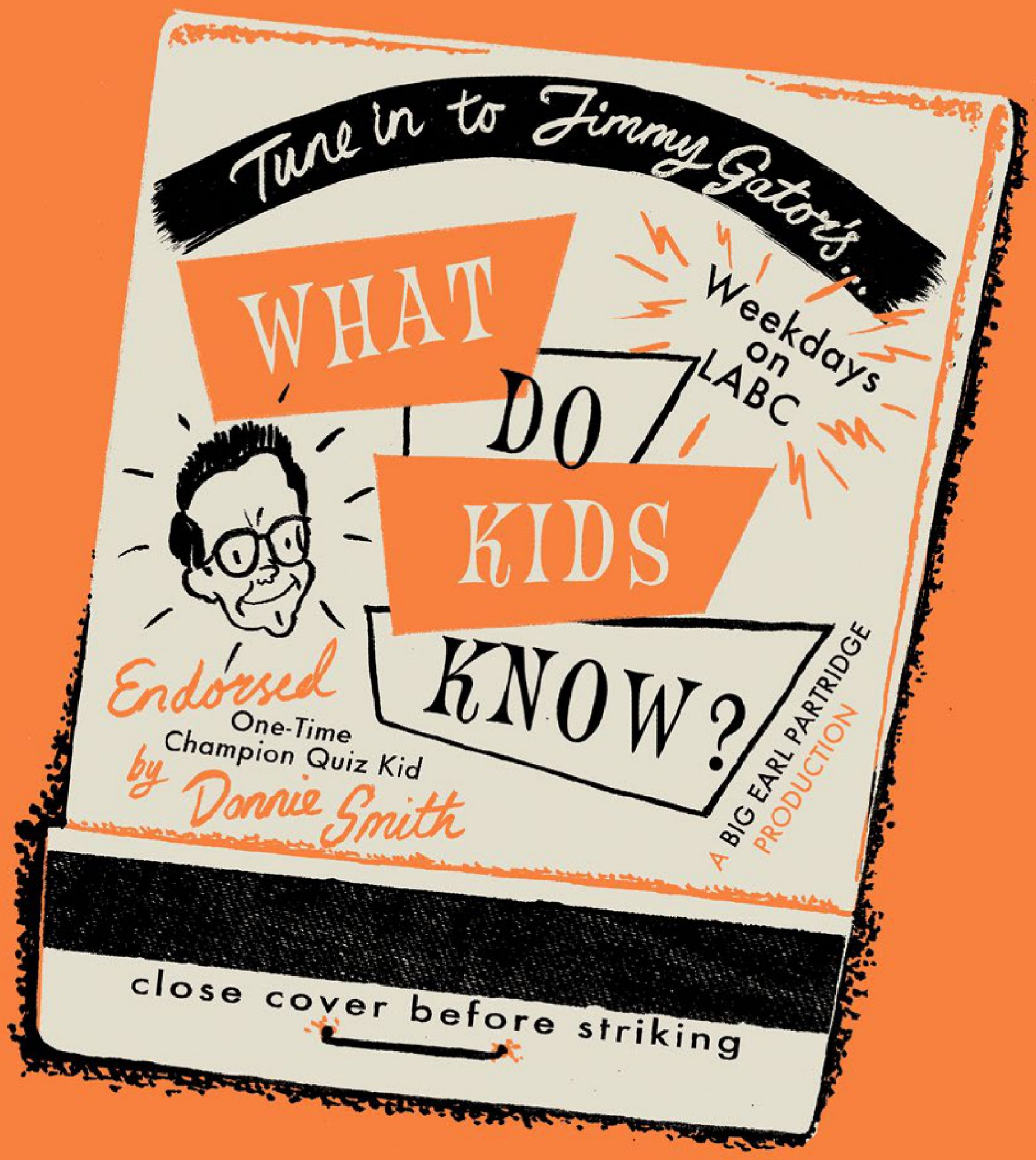
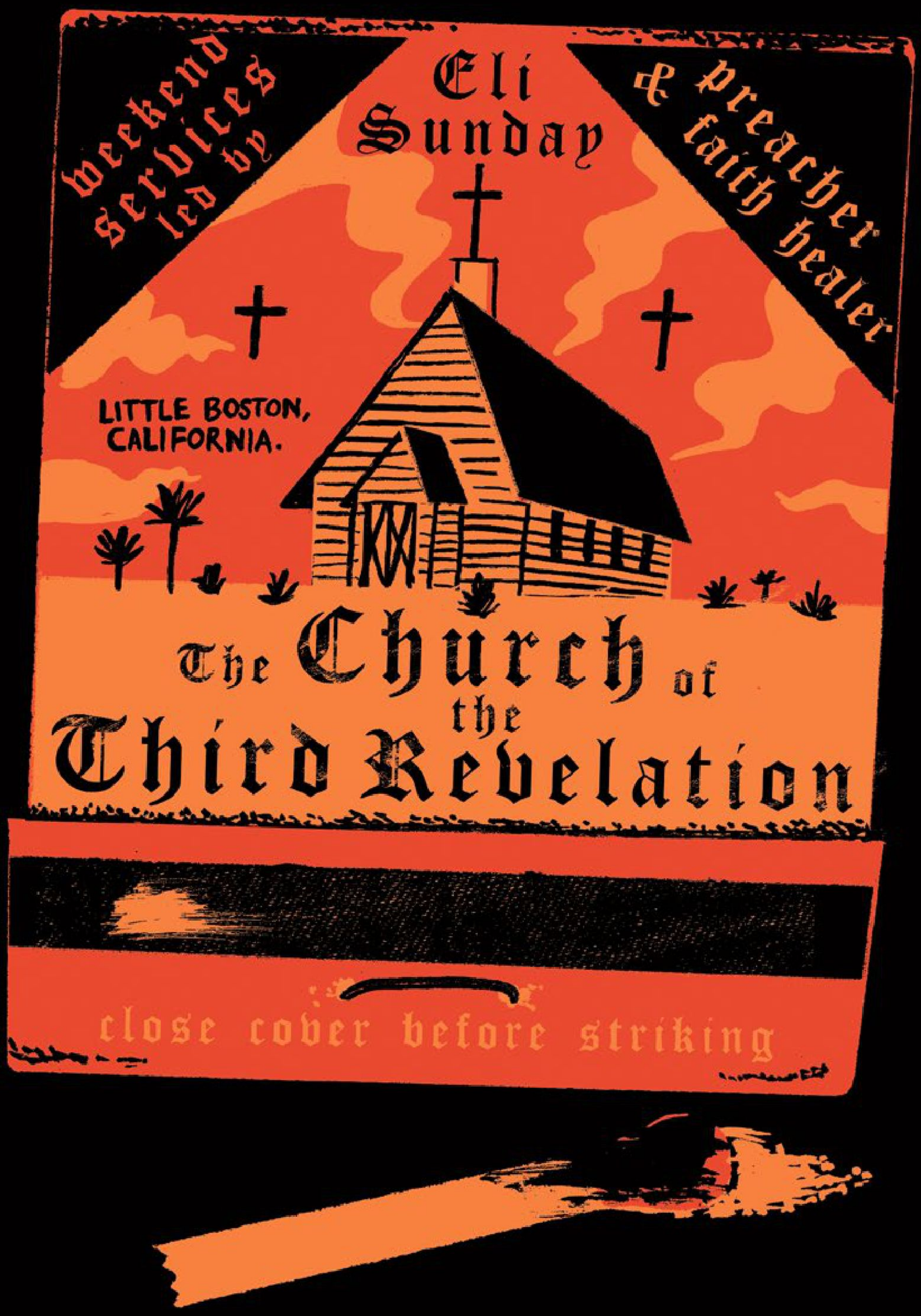
Boogie Nights
1997



Magnolia
1999

Punch-Drunk Love

2002


weekend services led by
Eli Sunday
& preacher of faith healer
LITTLE BOSTON, CALIFORNIA.
The Church of the Third Revelation
close cover before striking

There Will Be Blood

2007

The Master

2012

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OPERATOR
INHERENT VICE
ACT
AREA CODE 503
057-2014

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Birdman

Directed by **ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU**
Starring **MICHAEL KEATON, EMMA STONE, EDWARD NORTON**
Released **1 JANUARY**

Since his 2000 debut, *Amores Perros*, Alejandro González Iñárritu has, for better or worse, explored the deepest, darkest recesses of the human condition — dog fighting in Mexico City, marital strife in Morocco, tragedy in the basement sweat shops of Barcelona — as a means to better understand (or, more likely, attempt to keep a handle on) the ever-shifting paradigm of 21st century living. In doing so, he has experimented with an array of structures and techniques, from the handheld immediacy of *21 Grams*, to *Babel*'s multi-stranded narrative framework. *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* — to give the film its full title — is unquestionably his most innovative and uncompromising work.

Much of the early buzz surrounding the film centred on a long-since debunked rumour that it had been shot in a single take. Instead, Iñárritu, along with cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki and editor Douglas Crise, has constructed the film in such a way that it feels like one continuous shot. Superficially, this means there are no cuts — the rhythm is set by an occasionally incidental free jazz soundtrack, while timeframe jumps are marked with time-lapse shots. Like laying out the pieces of Hitchcock's *Rope*, however, there's nothing to really be gained from working out precisely how this brilliant effect was achieved. So let's just chalk it up as a triumph of digital filmmaking and move on.

Thematically, the film *Birdman* most closely resembles from Iñárritu's oeuvre is his difficult 2010 drama *Biutiful*, which saw Javier Bardem play a similarly flawed superhero-of-sorts with extraordinary and unexplained supernatural abilities. Here the Mexican writer/director finds Michael Keaton in hair-raisingly good form as a souped-up, more grotesque and surprisingly sympathetic version of that character. Riggan Thompson is a middle-aged actor who, 20 years since the last instalment of the '90s superhero franchise that made him famous, is starting to realise every actor's worst fear: that he has fallen out of public favour. With one last roll of the dice, he has chosen to write, direct and star in a Broadway adaptation of the Raymond Carver short story 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love' — the in-joke for anyone who's read it being that no-one in their right mind would think to repurpose it for the stage.

When Thompson loses his co-lead just days before opening night, he finds himself staring at the ignominy of having to cancel the entire production. His producer (a game Zach Galifianakis) is glibly pessimistic about finding a worthy replacement at the eleventh hour — Fassbender's shooting the new *X-Men* movie; Downey Jr's doing another *Iron Man* — but another co-star, played by Naomi Watts, has what seems like the perfect solution. Enter Mike Shiner (Edward Norton), a cocky method man whose intense on-stage alpha persona amusingly conflicts with his off-stage flaccidity. Quite clearly he is not the answer to this particular problem.

Compounding Thompson's mania are his ex-wife (Amy Ryan) and current squeeze (Andrea Riseborough), one a cruel reminder of the past he wasted, the other a long-suffering symbol of the future he doesn't want. Then there's fresh-from-rehab daughter, Sam (Emma Stone), or the girl with the feather tattoo, always present yet emotionally distant. Thompson's worst enemy, however, is himself.

Having never managed to step out of the shadow of his iconic superhero alter-ego, he now exists as the man who "used to be Birdman." Crippled by narcissism and consumed by his need to be adored, it's painful to see this once prominent A-lister desperately trying to fathom why he's no longer relevant. To the rest of us, of course, it's no wonder he's been forgotten. As Sam points out during a vitriolic tirade, he isn't even on Twitter.

This is where Iñárritu's message — as well as his choice of text-within-the-title — begins to crystallise. For as much as his film gleefully takes aim at acting, celebrity, blockbuster propaganda, social media and the saturation of the public sphere — and, with added relish, critics — *Birdman* is not as inherently cynical as it may initially appear. The most acerbic, pseudo-philosophical and quotable lines from the script, which are hogged by Norton and Galifianakis, feel infinitesimal when put next to a simple, passing remark from Thompson: "truth is always interesting".

Fundamentally, this is a film that boldly challenges the idea that love is a human right, a notion we have all been conditioned to believe. Through Thompson and the people who orbit him, we are told not only that love cannot be bought, but that some of us simply don't deserve to be loved. If this sounds like the kind of sobering epiphany Iñárritu has reached for (and sometimes failed to grasp) before, it's rendered less idealistic through the film's darkly comic tone. In one scene, Naomi Watts' character breaks down in her dressing room. Sobbing uncontrollably and spattered in blood, she reveals that all she ever wanted was for someone to tell her she made it. The characters in *Birdman* don't always find redemption, but Iñárritu's faith in people has never felt more real. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION. *Iñárritu! Lubezki! Keaton! Norton! Stone!*	**5**
ENJOYMENT. *A wickedly subversive, riotously funny intertextual psycho-odyssey.*	**4**
IN RETROSPECT. *Doesn't so much play fast-and-loose with cinematic convention as spit directly in its face.*	**5**

EMERGENCY
FIRST AID KIT
First Aid
dopaco

Interview by **ADAM WOODWARD** *Illustration by* **RIIKKA SORMUNEN**

Emma Stone

The *Birdman* star contemplates the nature of being a celebrity in the social media age.

It's not easy being a celebrity nowadays. The round-the-clock public obsession with the private lives of the rich and famous is such that a sneeze from a person of note is enough to cause at least a ripple on social media. There are those who crave the attention, just as there are those who go out of there way to protect their privacy. In *Birdman*, Alejandro González Iñárritu's biting satire on modern celebrity, Emma Stone plays Sam, the daughter of Michael Keaton's ailing movie star and a character who wears the stresses and strains of a life lived in the public eye. When we first meet her, she's fresh out of rehab, and it quickly becomes clear that she has not yet fully conquered her demons.

You won't find Stone on Twitter, or see her name splashed across the front page of some muckraking Hollywood rag. That's simply not her style. She's witnessed the corrosive effect of fame first-hand, and is constantly wary of the media's commoditisation of celebrity. But, as Stone explained to *LWLies* when we sat down with her at the Venice Film Festival last September, she admits to feeling a certain amount of empathy towards her character.

"Alejandro has said that everyone has a Birdman. I think what he meant by that, and how that relates to modern life, is that there seems to be a relationship to public life that everyone has access to. There's some social media presence or external view on how we live and who we are, and you have this element of curating your life within a social sphere — what pictures you put up or what quotes you share. It's all about what you tweet — or maybe you don't tweet; you only have Instagram. This notion of creating and maintaining an online persona, it's become such a huge part of all our lives.

"I know very, very few people, in any capacity, who have zero presence in a public sense. There's a sort of strange new paradigm towards who you are internally versus who you are externally, and what people are telling you about yourself, and what you know about yourself. If a bunch of people don't like you, or a bunch of people do like you, it causes you to ask so many different questions about yourself. In Riggan's case it becomes this huge burden of constantly seeking approval.

"I think what this film provides is a fascinating look at someone who prizes what people think about him over what he does. His reputation, or how that is perceived publicly, means more to him than his character. And that affects the people around him. Riggan is certainly not a grounding force for Sam. She has probably a very skewed version of how much blame goes to him for why she is the way she is. But she's young, and she's the daughter of a celebrity, which makes her a celebrity. It's a tough situation for both of them.

"It's a very modern phenomenon, this obsession with celebrity children. People weren't selling baby pictures for millions of dollars 50 years ago. It's fascinating to me — you have bidding wars over photos of children you don't know, of people you don't know. There are photographers who are paid to go around following little kids who have done nothing other than to be born to someone famous. What a hard lot, to be famous and be told all these things about yourself and about your family and to not have this support system that is able to bring you back down to earth. It was something that really informed my character, and I did look at certain relationships and people's lives to help me understand the character. I don't want to go into any further detail about that. Let's just say there's a fair amount that I grew to understand.

"I'll speak to people about how much I hate Twitter and how it's ruining our lives, and then I'll look at something like the [ALS] Ice Bucket Challenge and it will totally flip my perspective. Pouring a bucket of ice water over your head, it's so simple but it's had such a huge impact in terms of our awareness of this horrible disease. There's no doubt that social media has had a positive impact on the world, even though it's responsible for a lot of damage. It's a double-edged sword in that sense, and I think it's something that this movie looks at in a very sharp way"

Testament of Youth

Directed by **JAMES KENT**
Starring **ALICIA VIKANDER, HAYLEY ATWELL, DOMINIC WEST**
Released **16 JANUARY**

Those who think they don't make 'em like they used to may well enjoy James Kent's *Testament of Youth*. That's if your idea of how they used to make 'em equates to prettily packaged misery and stiff-upper-lipped loss. Based on a memoir by Vera Brittain, this is the debut feature of a seasoned TV director who unambitiously pitches this biopic at the *Downton Abbey* set rather than those more likely to take full heed of a trailblazing homegrown heroine.

Brittain was a nurse during World War One and later a celebrated writer and pacifist and whose wartime experiences were published in the eponympous 1933 autobiography. Kent's film portrays Vera (Alicia Vikander) as a spirited gal living through a stifling time, someone who rejects a life of after-dinner piano playing and domesticity. She doesn't just dream of becoming an Oxford scholar, but is stubborn and talented enough to make it happen. With the support of her beloved brother Edward (Taron Egerton) she successfully petitions her father (Dominic West) to allow her to sit the Oxford entrance exam. When war intervenes, however, the hopes of Vera and those around her are cruelly dashed.

Vikander makes for a distractingly exotic, waif-like heroine; her radiance might jar when she's up to her neck in the horrors of war but she's convincingly wilful and ably inspires respect and empathy. As love interest Roland, *Game of Thrones* star Kit Harington does his earnest, floppy-haired thing, yet he's less adept at communicating his character's deteriorating, battle-scarred psyche.

It might err towards the soft-focus, but Rob Hardy's cinematography is stunning, while Consolata Boyle's costume design consistently impresses too. The scale of Vera's personal tragedy is so great that it's impossible not to be moved, especially given how clueless everyone is going into the war ('The papers are saying it'll be short and fast'), and it's heartbreaking to watch the boys line up eagerly, like lambs to the slaughter. But Kent applies such smothering nostalgia that the rawness and true depth of emotion struggle to break through. His film also tends toward the awkwardly twee — for example when Hayley Atwell turns up as a fellow nurse, her performance so epitomises the expression 'jolly hockey sticks' — it wouldn't be a shock if she came right out and said it.

This is a suffocatingly sad story but Kent's staunch commitment to palatability means it's all too carefully controlled. We finally see Vera rage at the futility of war and the bloody, agonising, anonymous deaths it incurs in a passionate polemic at the close, but by then it's too late. Playing things so safe means that *Testament of Youth* feels a touch too TV-at-teatime; it prioritises its status as respectable heritage drama over showing the reality of combat and the ugliness of extreme emotion. Even if it would not have been totally appropriate to give us blood-and-guts realism, this remarkable woman deserved a more fearless approach. **EMMA SIMMONDS**

ANTICIPATION. *Seems overwhelmingly... nice.*	**3**
ENJOYMENT. *Beautiful and moving when it should be devastatingly, unforgettably upsetting.*	**3**
IN RETROSPECT. *Heartbreak porn and little more.*	**2**

Whiplash

Directed by **DAMIEN CHAZELLE**
Starring **MILES TELLER, JK SIMMONS, MELISSA BENOIST**
Released **16 JANUARY**

Blood, sweat and a hideous use of the term "faggot" flow amid rolling abuse that is homophobic, sexist and all shades of offensive. It spills out of the mouth of Terence Fletcher (JK Simmons) and infects the ears of his young protégés — fearful, sad-eyed obsessives. This verbal ugliness — off-putting though it may be — is intentional and just one note of the multi-instrumental jazz-band that makes up *Whiplash*.

Damien Chazelle's directorial debut feeds off his experience as a student drummer. It asks questions like: 'Where is the line between motivation and abuse?', 'What would you sacrifice to be creatively great?' and 'Who cares what you do when you've set out your stall as a revolting human being?' It does so within a tightly told, euphorically shot tale of an ambitious drummer's relationship with a psychopathic teacher.

We're at the fictional Shaffer Conservatory of Music in New York City — "the best music school America." Andrew Neiman (Miles Teller) is introduced through a doorway as he practices alone, his drumming accelerating until it is one continuous noise. The camera slowly glides along the corridor and through the door. Andrew looks up and the shot reveals itself as being from the perspective of Fletcher, the black-clad, bulging-eyed conductor of the first band. Andrew's jaw drops as if it was the Messiah himself.

Whiplash moves to comic beats, just one of its many shape-shifting skills. Simmons is a beloved comic actor and he spits out lines at the right tempo to front them as hilarious. For a short spell he could be the loveable rogue, just as Andrew could be an introverted hero destined to flower and be redeemed through musical recognition. Chazelle plays with our presumptions. When Andrew shyly asks out Nicole (Melissa Benoist), the sweet babe who works at the cinema, he seems to be headed down that exact path.

'What if success doesn't suit a person?' is another question the film asks amid intense practice sessions. Andrew drums until he bleeds, listening to Buddy Rich and shutting out the world beyond Shaffer's dark mahogany-lined rooms. Simmons (in jest?) has referred to Teller as a "contemptible little prick". Teller's recourse to sneering and opaque distancing techniques increasingly makes his Andrew something of an asp in the bosom. All the while Chazelle's method of shooting his drumming and the rest of the band players is earnest and loving. Musical reverence is a given. It's where passion can sanely conjoin with the rest of the world that is routinely called into question.

This is a rabidly intelligent debut with a finale that is a fast-paced montage shot from above and below, in close up and in wide, cutting from instrument to instrument in perfect time to jazz standard, 'Caravan'. As pumping a finale as this is, there are sufficient reminders along the way that one man's dream is another's grotesque isolation. Chazelle has made a film that entertains as it interrogates. One final question is: when the abuser wants from you exactly what you want out of yourself, can you still call it abuse?
SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

ANTICIPATION. *Drummed up symphonious praise on the festival circuit.*	**4**
ENJOYMENT. *Whip-smart.*	**4**
IN RETROSPECT. *A cracking effort from all concerned.*	**4**

Amour Fou

Directed by **JESSICA HAUSNER**
Starring **CHRISTIAN FRIEDEL, BIRTE SCHNOEINK, STEPHAN GROSSMANN**
Released **6 FEBRUARY**

The signature image of Jessica Hausner's fact-based, 19th century-set *Amour Fou* is of a woman's face obscured by a bouquet of flowers — a suggestive emblem for high society, of perfumed surfaces overlaid on human frailties. There's no question that Henriette Vogel (Birte Schnoeink) looks like a delicate blossom, and so she attracts the pest-like attention of the writer Heinrich Kleist (Christian Friedel), a capital-R Romantic poet who propositions this married young woman with a capital-R Romantic scenario: join him in a suicide pact and, in doing so, exercise a measure of control over their otherwise inexorably regimented and predictable lives.

The trick of *Amour Fou* is that it takes this set-up and treats it as a kind of attenuated small-r romantic farce — the fateful meet cute between a man with great powers of persuasion and a woman looming for something to fall in thrall to. Henriette's fascination with Kleist's story 'The Marquise of O,' about a courtesan who is violated in her sleep by a man she loves, hints at a submissive fantasy that, in one of this wry film's numerous high ironies, does not in fact run counter to the attitudes of her countrymen; if anything, Henriette's apparent yen to be manipulated doubles down on her culture's privileging of masculine authority. Prodded by doctors, bewitched by hypnotists and only hesitantly indulged by her husband (Stephan Crossman), Henriette is a frail figure arousing concern but not a lot of curiosity about they mystries of desire.

This is not to say that *Amour Fou* paints Heinrich Kleist as a heroic libertine; to the contrary, he's played by Friedel as a weaselly self-mythologiser who is using his new co-conspirator as a sounding board — a way of convincing himself of his own life philosophy. (One of the script's funniest and apparently authentic touches is that Heinrich approaches several women with his soul-mate spiel — he's a pick-up artist peddling death-as-transcendence).

Hausner keeps finding ways to expose her anti-hero's basic feebleness without tipping the film into an explicit critique, and while the film's icy camera style and puncturing of bourgeois mores (and focus on a suicide pact) may remind some viewers of her fellow Austrian Michael Haneke, she's at once gentler and funnier when it comes to her characters — which is not to say that the film is soft. The climax, when it comes, is startling not because of what happens (Vogel and Kleist's fates can be discovered easily enough) but rather the precise nature of the staging of the climax, which takes the underlying theme of free expression and implodes it in a single instant. The exact opposite of a grace note, it's a scene which casts the little bit of the film that comes afterwards in shadow — a shade that grows longer and darker in the hours and days after the credits roll. **ADAM NAYMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *It's been a long ol' while since Austrian director Jessica Hausner graced us with her previous film,* Lourdes. **4**

ENJOYMENT. *A purse-lipped comedy of 19th Century manners and an exploration into the banality of romance.* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *The surface-level chamber LOLs linger as a mysterious, dark portrait of human foibles.* **4**

Interview by **DAVID JENKINS** *Illustration by* **LAURÈNE BOGLIO**

Jessica Hausner

The *Amour Fou* director tells *LWLies* why she avoids labels in her work.

Austrian director Jessica Hausner is fixated with emotional conundrums which seemingly have no rational explanation. *Amour Fou*, her fourth feature, is a dry-as-a-bone comedy about the futility of romantic love, a follow-up to 2009's arch parable on religious devotion, *Lourdes*.

LWLies: What were your formative cinema going experiences?

Hausner: There are two cinemas in Vienna that show old films. One is the Filmmuseum, and the other one is the Stadtkino. When I was young, I went to those places a lot. It was part of my cinematographic education.

What is the relationship between this film and *Lourdes*?

I think there is a relationship. The longer I work as a filmmaker, the more I get to know my themes. *Lourdes* and *Amour Fou*, in both cases, are about unsolved mysteries. They're like riddles I think. Something happens, then I try to find out what is actually going on. The question in the films that arises is always about identity. If someone does not fit in, what does that mean? Is it a bad or a good thing? What expectations to we have from society as an individual?

Is this something you have a personal interest in?

Yes, I think so. I'm very often astonished by the fact that things are often not like you'd expect them to be. When I was young I tried to write a novel, and then I stopped because I didn't like the idea of language. Language is a way to label things, to name them. And this means you interpret them. Making a film is also an act of interpretation, but I'm trying to make films with things that remain unlabelled. I want people to come away from my films with opposite readings.

Is an edit a similar thing to a word in terms of being a label?

Yes, absolutely, and that's why I hate to cut. I really think I have to develop something for the next film because whenever I have a set-up with two people and am forced to use the very traditional shot and counter-shot, I just hate it. I can just never, ever decide which should be on and which should be off. I am must more comfortable when the scene is developing within the frame and you can see all the action. Editing is like my decisions instead of the spectators. Editing makes it obvious that a film is a trick.

Is that not what cinema is?

Yes, I guess. Recently I was reading an evaluation from an institute in Austria where they rate films good, medium or bad. They give notes and the idea is that the audience get some basic orientation. With *Amour Fou*, the jury was half half. One half said it was so distant that it didn't involve them at all, and this is a mistake. This is not cinema. They other half said, no this is exactly what is interesting about cinema. With *Lourdes*, the film was shown in Venice and won the ecumenical prize for best Catholic film and also a prize from an atheist organisation.

Why did you have the child sing the full song twice?

When we did some pre-screenings of the film, a lot of people told me to cut earlier from the child singing. I said I knew why they were asking — the tension is high and you usually cut when the tension is highest. But I said, 'No, I don't want to give this to you. You have to listen to the whole song and I want to be a little bit annoying by being a little bit boring.'

Did you find it tough to get funding for a film about a double suicide?

No, not really. It's a pretty normal thing for cinema. In fact, it was probably easier to get money. There was, however, one group who refused to give me money and their reason was that they didn't think a woman could tell this story about a male poet.

Did you think the film would be the same if the genders were reversed?

It would also be interesting, but I think it would make the film more about gender than about love. If it would also be in the 19th century, the question you'd be asking is, how can a woman be a poet at that time. She would've had to work under cover or with a male name. I only set it in the 19th century when I read about Kleist. He asked various different people to die with him, and I think his motives say something about the selfishness of love.

Is the fact that Henrich is a poet important to the workings of the story?

Poet or any sort of artist. It is characteristic, although his self-centredness is also making fun of those type of men who think they're a genius. You find this in poets, painters, authors. And filmmakers, of course

The Tales of Hoffmann (1951)

Directed by **MICHAEL POWELL, EMERIC PRESSBURGER**
Starring **ROBERT ROUNSEVILLE, MOIRA SHEARER, ROBERT HELPMANN**
Released **27 FEBRUARY**

When Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's film of Offenbach's fantastical 1881 grand opera first appeared, there had never been anything like it. Of course, opera productions had been captured on film before, but this was different — the work was created anew in the film studios and rendered in gloriously indulgent three-strip Technicolor. The key was recording the music first, which essentially freed Powell and Pressburger to shoot to playback. At liberty to whirl the cumbersome cameras around like never before, they also cast physically expressive dancers — like flaming redhead Moira Shearer and sinister character specialist Robert Helpmann — to handle the choicest parts in Offenbach's saga of a yearning poet searching for an eternally elusive feminine ideal.

Essentially, this is where Powell and Pressburger invented the pop video way back in 1951, though the lilting 'Barcarolle' is the only big tune here to percolate into wider public consciousness. In so doing, they created a kaleidoscopic audiovisual experience, shimmering with spangly costumes and thriving on the more outré and macabre elements in the material, not least where Shearer's exquisite mechanical doll is merrily dismembered and beheaded when it's discovered she's not actually the real thing.

Full-on colour coding delineates Hoffman the poet's different romantic misadventures, a riot of reds in the carnivalesque Venetian section where he tangles with a seductive courtesan, contrasted with a panoply of Mediterranean blues for his encounter with an ill-fated opera singer on a Greek island. And since they shot the whole thing in a mere 17 days, those very same swathes of colour often stand in for the sets they never built, sometimes even painting stuff in instead — like the memorable image of a golden staircase simply drawn on the studio floor.

All of which is so creatively daring and flamboyant that you can only sit there and wonder why you're not enjoying it as much as you'd anticipated. The directors throw absolutely everything at the screen, yet like any 19th-century opera *Hoffmann* does rather plod its way towards crescendos of tragic ecstasy, sturdy American tenor Robert Rounseville's protagonist somewhat lacking the screen acting craft to convey the psychological rollercoaster ride his character — and hence the audience — should be feeling, but never really registers.

Unlike the very best works of Powell and Pressburger (as in, say, *The Red Shoes* or *A Matter of Life and Death*), the visual magic and a passionate belief in the intoxicating potency of art aren't, in this case, matched by a strong narrative drive pummelling and intensifying our emotions. It's an impressive undertaking all right, yet somehow it all feels a bit too academic and effortful — though Martin Scorsese and George Romero are among those absolute evangelists who have publically recalled how the dash and splendour of this fine movie first bewitched them during childhood. See it and make up your own mind. **TREVOR JOHNSTON**

ANTICIPATION. *A 4k restoration of a film by Britain's greatest ever filmmaking duo is not to be missed.*	**5**
ENJOYMENT. *Done with a genuine flair, but the material is never as spellbinding as you want it to be.*	**3**
IN RETROSPECT. *A worthwhile component of Powell and Pressburger's inestimable legacy.*	**4**

Selma

Directed by **AVA DUVERNAY**
Starring **DAVID OYELOWO, CARMEN EJOGO, TOM WILKINSON**
Released **6 FEBRUARY**

Racially-motivated violence perpetrated by white, state-appointed agents upon black civilians has swiftly and tragically become one of the defining social traumas of the modern age. Ava DuVernay's devastating drama, *Selma*, frames this problem as a case of history in chronic revolution, though the film's timeliness only enhances its power as a sophisticated, rigorous and unsentimental investigation into how violence is allowed to flourish through bureaucratic institutions rather than bigoted communities. Yet *Selma* would pass as a great movie whatever the current news agenda, as it explores issues of universal import such as the nuances of popular protest, the media as a tool for political dissemination, how rhetoric can be transformed into action, and the fact that radical change will only likely be achieved by wading through pools of hot blood.

The film charts the indirect stand-off between the black denizens of Selma, Alabama who, in 1964, have been systematically denied voting rights by white oppressors, and President Lyndon Johnson (Tom Wilkinson) who refuses to sign-off laws which would strike out intimidation and (finally) give a democratic voice to a representative majority regardless of skin colour. Key to its success is that despite chronicling real events, *Selma* is not a biopic. David Oyelowo scintillates as Dr Martin Luther King Jr, perfectly emulating the hard, rolling 'Hs' as well as the lilting, latent musicality of his speech patterns while never coming across like a overly-studied collection of carefully imitated character tics.

The numerous passages in which MLK orates to a congregation in Selma match (if not quite transcend) the intensity of similar scenes delivered by Denzel Washington in Spike Lee's comparable 1992 epic, *Malcolm X*. There is a beautiful consistency to Oyelowo's performance, especially in the delicate tonal overlap between King's private and public personas. Part of the film's potency derives from the fact that DuVernay, Oyelowo and co-writer Paul Webb opt against making King the subject of the film, instead placing him as a guiding figure whose decisions exert a profound effect on history. Discourse is the subject. Obligation in the subject. Selma is the subject.

The film is broadly celebratory of King's successes without ever erring into tasteless triumphalism or suggesting that these victories will have direct ramifications in the distant future. King is not lionised — far from it. Indeed, the energy and hope inferred by the finale, which sees King lead a civil rights march from Selma to the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery, is dulled if not reversed by the knowledge that the results of his good work were transitory at best. *Selma* has few comforting words for those with retrograde attitudes, such as ol' boy Alabama governor George Wallace (Tim Roth), though in the spirit of its subject, refrains from painting these racists as stock hate figures. Though it sees no occasion for humour (perhaps rightly so), the film comes across as a spiritual descendent to one of John Ford's civic fables such as *Young Mr Lincoln* or *The Sun Shines Bright*, which is high praise indeed. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *The awards buzz around Ava DuVernay's film has become deafening.*	**4**
ENJOYMENT. *A vital piece of work from an invigorating new voice. Oyelowo is a revelation.*	**5**
IN RETROSPECT. *DuVernay and Oyelowo announce themselves as major talents.*	**5**

Foxcatcher

Directed by **BENNETT MILLER**
Starring **STEVE CARELL, CHANNING TATUM, MARK RUFFALO**
Released **9 JANUARY**

Two brothers stand on a thick rubber mat. Heads bowed, shoulders forward, arms locked. Their heavy grunts and squeaking trainers set a nervous rhythm for the brutal ballet in which they are entwined. This is the image of brotherly love and rivalry presented by Bennett Miller in his rich, character-driven drama, *Foxcatcher*.

Like the writer/director's previous films, *Moneyball* and *Capote*, this one is based on true events, although the facts have plainly been dramatised as a way to extract truth in what is a complex tale of loyalty, paranoia and betrayal. The two men entrenched in battle in that gripping opening sequence are Mark (Channing Tatum) and Dave Schultz (Mark Ruffalo). Both are Olympic Champions, but while the former is the more impressive specimen, mentor Dave has the mental edge over his younger sibling. He's past his prime, slightly balding and cauliflower-eared, but he still emanates greatness. Despite his individual success, Mark has never been able to step out of his big brother's shadow, and his pent-up anxiety and anger over a failure to assume alpha supremacy comes out in fits of concentrated self-punishment — in one disturbing early scene, Mark literally punches himself in the face.

Emotionally vulnerable and blinded by ambition, Mark accepts an out-of-the-blue invitation to meet with mega rich John Eleuthère du Pont (Steve Carell, pitch perfect and near unrecognisable under an ugly prosthetic nose and emotionless grin). The heir to a chemical corporation fortune, du Pont brings Mark in by helicopter to his gleaming white mansion, set against the grand backwoods of Pennsylvania, and promptly propositions him with an offer that's too good to refuse.

With the World Championships fast approaching and the 1988 Seoul Games on the horizon, du Pont reveals his plans to become the saviour of USA Wrestling, persuading Mark with his creepy charisma and state-of-the-art 'Foxcatcher' training facility he's had custom-built on the property. With Mark's trust paid for, Team Foxcatcher is born. But when Du Pont asks Dave to join them, his response presents Mark with an obvious question to which he has no answer: what's the catch?

A self-proclaimed author, ornithologist, philanthropist, world explorer and "golden eagle of America", du Pont loves two things: wrestling and his country. He spouts garbled constitutional rhetoric about the importance of patriotism and encourages Mark and the other young men he takes under his wing to ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. He's a bullshit merchant. A bogus coach. A cuckolded right-wing millionaire with serious delusions of grandeur. And also, a desperately lonely man, possibly plagued by mental illness.

Even with his considerable investment and constant reaffirmations of faith, du Pont knows his bond with Mark will never be as strong as Dave's. He watches the intensive daily training regimes from the sidelines, offering the odd stock motivational gesture, frustrated by Dave's absence. Du Pont may be willing to go to whatever lengths necessary to change his mind, but Dave is a dedicated family man looking for a settled life. But as we all know, every man has his price, and when du Pont finally brings Dave into his inner circle, the film shifts towards Greek tragedy — the abuse of wealth and power that first instilled Mark with the belief that he could finally achieve the status he craves suddenly becomes the catalyst for his gradual psychological breakdown.

In a bizarre twist, du Pont breaks every virtue he claims to exemplify, tempting Mark with drugs and leading him towards a life of excess. Is he purposely sabotaging his pet project, or just blissfully unaware of the damage he's causing? Either way, he's an unconvincing patriarch, and the brief but significant interference of his elderly mother (Vanessa Redgrave) suggests that he too is driven by a need to prove that he is worthy of the proud legacy he has inherited.

As the three men grapple for control, the film builds steadily towards a violent conclusion, one that Miller subtly alludes to without revealing precisely how it will unfold. When the moment comes, you'll be left saddened and confused by the image of one man laying face-down in the snow, silently gasping for his last mouthful of air. But Miller doesn't leave us out there in the cold. He throws us right back into the ring, capping things off with a familiar, rousing chant that prompts us to reflect on the lies and propaganda that lead young Americans to sacrifice everything in the name of national pride. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION. *The story Bennett Miller has been waiting to tell since 2006.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *Muscular performances match Miller's solid direction.* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *A true crime drama with a twist.* **3**

FOXCATCHER
WRESTLING

TEAM
FOXCATCHER
FOXCATCHER

Interview by **ADAM WOODWARD** *Illustration by* **RIIKKA SORMUNEN**

Bennett Miller & Steve Carell

The writer/director and star of *Foxcatcher* chat comedy inspiration and facial prosthetics.

Following in the footsteps of Peter Sellers, Robin Williams and Jim Carrey, Steve Carell challenges his benign screen persona to disquieting effect in Bennett Miller's true crime drama, *Foxcatcher*. Carell plays John du Pont, the wealthy wrestling enthusiast whose unhealthy relationship with Olympic wrestling champions Mark and Dave Schultz ended in tragedy in 1996. Miller and Carell spoke to *LWLies* about the challenge of developing this complex character.

Bennett Miller: The first time I met Steve I saw a seriousness and an insightfulness about him. This is a tragic story and Steve's reflections on the script bore no resemblance to anything you might have seen on *The Office*. That, coupled with Steve's comic styling, I just think was a really kinky cocktail. My feeling about good comic actors — not necessarily comedians, but comic actors — is that they can do anything. Maybe it's an unfair bias in their favour, but if you can do comedy well then the other stuff, given the right circumstances, is absolutely within reach.

Steve Carell: One of the things that I found exhilarating was getting to explore a different side of myself. Channing [Tatum], Mark [Ruffalo] and I kept to ourselves. We gravitated to different places, physically and emotionally. I think we all felt it was better to not make those personal connections. I'm so wary of pretentious actor talk, of "method acting" or whatever, but I think it inadvertently became that. I never consciously set out to subvert people's expectations of me as an actor, though.

BM: That's right, but from the perspective of you being a comic actor we discussed stuff like *Scrooge* with Alastair Sim, who was predominantly known as a comedic actor at the time, and likewise Peter Sellers in things like *Being There* and also Anthony Hopkins in *The Remains of the Day*.

SC: Another thing about Du Pont was that he had such a specific look and I think that contributed in great part to how people treated him and responded to him. He was repellent in many ways, physically. The make up inadvertently informed me of that when I was on set — I could feel that sense of others not wanting to be in my company. It's nothing that I had planned on; it wasn't a preconceived notion, more an interesting effect.

BM: I'm just remembering now though something that you did on our camera test day, before we began shooting that possibly could have contributed to that feeling... The first time Steve appeared on set, it was the first time the crew and the rest of the cast had seen him in full make up. I remember everyone was getting into position, moving lights around and making last-minute adjustments and all of a sudden Steve's voice pierced above the din of the set in a very loud, humourless, stinging register, announcing, "Carell is spelled with *one* 'r' and *two* 'l's." The room was absolutely silenced, and that chair disappeared in a snap. Really, in a near-impossible feat of prop management, his chair came back in what seemed like no time at all with his name spelled correctly. That really set the tone moving forward. Do you remember that?

SC: I do. It seemed like they went and did it immediately. I just wanted to try out the character and see how people reacted.

BM: Du Pont was this dopey, benign fellow who could surprise you with a hard slap across the face. So the make up served two functions really. But at its most effective it became part of the character and helped people understand the alienation he felt because of the way he looked.

SC: People treated me differently. Very rarely was I seen out of make-up, because I'd be in it for three hours and I'd be in two hours before everyone got to set, and I'd generally be one of the last to leave. I always got the sense when people saw my face that they'd almost forgotten I was there.

BM: That absolutely happened. It took me a bit of time to acclimate back to the real Steve Carell, because I never saw him without make up on. It was a 55-day shoot, that's a long time to spend in someone's company when they're almost unrecognisable from the person you know

Love is Strange

Directed by **IRA SACHS**
Starring **JOHN LITHGOW, ALFRED MOLINA, MARISA TOMEI**
Released **6 FEBRUARY**

The title of this new movie from director Ira Sachs offers an extremely banal observation, perhaps hinting at an oblique subtext which states that love is such an irreducibly illogical beast, that making profound statements about its earthly application are futile. You could almost read it as a kind of free pass to get away with lots of irrational human behaviour. Because hey, didn't you hear? Love is strange. You can't account for it. Jog on.

Alfred Molina's George and John Lithgow's Ben wake up, take a shower, each put on a vintage three-piece suit and bolt down to their local registry office in Manhattan to be wed. After years of domestic companionship, the knot is finally tied for all to see, though Ben's Catholic school paymasters now have a major conflict of interest shoved under their hypocritical noses. Fired from his position as a music teacher and choirmaster, the pair are forced apart until new, affordable lodgings become available. George heads to his now ex-neighbour's sofa, a young gay couple who like to party hard and, with their police uniforms (they are both cops), slyly reference The Village People. Ben, meanwhile, accepts the strained hospitality of his niece, Kate (Marissa Tomei), who doesn't really have the space or the patience to have him around.

Sachs' film is content to sit and watch as this trying situation plays out, leaning back on the truism that life is tough when you're separated from your true love. One doesn't like to pick apart plot points in serious, passionate movies such as this, but it's hard to believe that these mature newlyweds would opt for such drastic measures over, say, renting a cheap hotel or opting to move a little further out from the city centre. Their estrangement sits awkwardly as a dramatic construct which allows Sachs to study their behaviour patterns while under the dark cloud of sullenness, and even mortality.

The film borrows its set-up from Leo McCarey's 1937 masterpiece, *Make Way For Tomorrow*, in which an elderly heterosexual couple undergo similar later-life indignities due to financial woes. Yet that film gained credibility through historical context and the realisation that these doddery characters really had nowhere else to go. Ben and George are worldly types, and the proposal that their relationship can be co-opted as a bargaining chip for long-term happiness rings bogus.

Sachs picks up on small details such as what it's like being a loose-limb in a room where the drama doesn't involve you, and there's an interesting and subtly erotic subplot examining Ben's efforts to paint a portrait of a young boy who is close friends with Kate's gawky son. Yet, as we see in the film's latter stages, the A-material here is the relationship between Ben and George, and all the best moments involve their honest, lightly lovey-dovey interactions. The counter-intuitive plot of the film is about what it's like when these characters are apart. It's a dramatic equation that Sachs sadly doesn't manage to solve, but it's bittersweet fun to watch all the the working out he does along the way. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Though he seldom smashes it out the park, there's enough reason to believe Ira Sachs will do so very soon.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *It is enjoyable, if never really all that believable.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *Would love to see another movie about these two characters.* **3**

It Follows

Directed by **DAVID ROBERT MITCHELL**
Starring **MAIKA MONROE, KEIR GILCHRIST, DANIEL ZOVATTO**
Released **27 FEBRUARY**

In a single, sinuous take, the camera circles a middle-class suburban street as panicky-lookingteenager Annie (Bailey Spry) runs out of her house, constantly looking over her shoulder and unconvincingly brushing aside a confused neighbour's concern. Annie drives off, and we next see her sitting on a beach alone at night, on the phone telling her dad that she loves him and apologising for past misdemeanours. In this hasty goodbye to childhood, Annie occupies a literally littoral space, yet does not seem quite ready to face the infinite ocean at her back. Come the dawn, Annie is just a mangled, corpse, lying bloody on the sand.

This opening to David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* establishes its generic allegiance to horror, while also introducing water as the film's most fluid of recurring symbols. When we first meet 19-year-old protagonist Jay (Maika Monroe), she is floating, bikinied, in the bounded waters of a small backyard pool. On the cusp of adulthood, she is still contained within the protective environment of a suburban family home, yet old enough to be the sexualised object of the male gaze (in this case shared with two spying local boys). After having sex with her older boyfriend (Jake Weary), Jay discovers that he has deliberately passed on to her an infectious affliction. Something relentless, protean and deadly is now following her and will eventually catch up — although she can slow its progress by transmitting the infection sexually to others. Jay seeks to evade, maybe even defeat, the 'it' of the title, travelling from the relative security of the leafy suburbs to the forbidden urban decay across town, and from her paddling pool to the bigger public pool (where she had her first teen kiss and drink) to the beach and the altogether more dangerous waters beyond.

With all these boundaries being transgressed, *It Follows* offers anxious coming-of-age drama, as Jay, her younger sister, Kelly (Lili Sepe), and their best friends depart from the Eden of childhood for a first dip into their own decline and mortality. Set in a Detroit that could be from today or from 30 years ago, with Disasterpeace's John Carpenter-esque synth score further muddying the chronological waters, the film exhibits the same dreamy preoccupation with teenage rites of passage as its writer/director's lyrical 2010 debut *The Myth of the American Sleepover*.

Viewed purely as a monster movie, this is creepily tense and often surreal, with one of the most ickily Freudian scenes of body horror in memory. Yet, unusually for the genre, these young teens are all likeable and genuinely look out for each other, keeping viewers closely engaged with their fates. The monstrous antagonist here is all new — and yet so ancient as to be timeless — and the film positively shimmers within its own metaphorical glow. For not unlike the Russian novel that one of Jay's teenaged friends reads throughout, *It Follows* unremittingly pursues the two greatest themes in both art and life, as its adolescent kids learn to stave off with sex, however temporarily, the ineluctable approach of death. Most of all though, this is a film about waiting: for adulthood, experience and annihilation. **ANTON BITEL**

ANTICIPATION. *The buzz from Cannes was loud.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *Dreamy, creepy coming-of-ager.* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *Waiting is scary in this mature, character-based horror.* **4**

The Last of the Unjust

Directed by **CLAUDE LANZMANN**
Starring **BENJAMIN MURMELSTEIN, CLAUDE LANZMANN**
Released **9 JANUARY**

Claude Lanzmann's 1985 magnum opus, *Shoah*, has cast a long, lingering shadow over both the career of its creator and the discipline of documentary filmmaking in its entirity. In the 30 years since *Shoah*'s release, Lanzmann has continued to devote himself almost solely to the excavation of not only the histories of the Holocaust, but to the mountains of footage he himself shot over the 10-plus years of the film's development. It's clear that the impetus behind *Shoah*, along with the now four subsequent films he has created from the same reserve of original material, is less a one-off project than an ongoing ideological and artistic concern.

Such a continuum is appropriate considering Lanzmann's dedication to the restoration and reanimation of past events for the present day. And in that sense, *The Last of the Unjust* is another monumental unveiling of a shrouded episode in world history, as well as a crucial reconciliation of the tenets of memory and morality though the most catastrophic prism imaginable. Structured around a handful of interviews conducted in 1975 with Rabbi Benjamin Murmelstein, the final president of the Jewish Council at Theresienstadt and the sole surviving "Jewish Elder," a succession of Nazi-anointed administrators who helped govern various concentration camps during the war years, the film is told largely through the written and verbal recollections of its eponymous subject, presenting this most controversial of positions as a burden of contradictions pitted at the very crux of betrayal and benevolence.

Again using no archival footage, Lanzmann manages to seamlessly situate the film within multiple time periods, contrasting and commenting upon his conversations with Murmelstein and their discussion of his role in the embellishments of this "model ghetto," with present day visits to Theresienstadt where the director reads aloud from the rabbi's 1961 book, 'Terezin, il Ghetto Modello di Eichmann.' For Lanzmann, the past is not a closed conversation, but instead an ongoing dialogue, attaining new resonance with the accumulation of time and the addition of new perspectives.

For his part, Murmelstein is a dazzlingly sharp and involving storyteller, weaving first-hand details of working under the domineering hand of Adolf Eichmann with, at times, disconcerting defenses for his own actions ("Perhaps I thirsted for adventure"). Much of the interview is given over to semantic debate (the categorical classifications of Jews, "East" as a pretense for Auschwitz, the marked distinction between martyrs and saints), but Lanzmann just as sagely allows his images to accrue an existential gravitas, formulating at once an inquiry into the capacity of our moral constitution and an aesthetic hypothesis for the dimensions of memory itself. As such, Lanzmann's cinema remains less document than testament, one of immense power and integrity — a legacy of legacies.
JORDAN CRONK

ANTICIPATION. *The storied French documentarian's first theatrical feature in over a decade.*	**5**
ENJOYMENT. *A powerful excavation of a shrouded event in the history of the Holocaust.*	**5**
IN RETROSPECT. *A historical restoration for a modern day reckoning.*	**5**

Au Revoir les Enfants (1987)

Directed by **LOUIS MALLE**
Starring **GASPARD MANESSE, RAPHAEL FEJTÖ, FRANCINE RACETTE**
Released **30 JANUARY**

Autobiographical elements inform many of the films of celebrated French director Louis Malle but they are, arguably, never so deeply felt as in his sorrowful, beautifully-acted, World War Two-set, 1987 film, *Au Revoir les Enfants*. His straightforward story tells of the evolving friendship between two 12-year old boys, Julien and Jean, boarders of a Priest-run school for the upper middle-classes outside Paris during the bleak mid-winter of 1943/1944 in Nazi-occupied France. It is what Malle called a "re-invention" of his own long-pondered experiences — "in terms of character, action, detail, it's 75 per cent fiction."

Fiction it may be, but Malle makes sure that the recreation — the chronicle, for most of the film is just that — of school life he depicts is absolutely true to memory: thus the sombre blues, greys and blacks with which his talented cinematographer Renato Berta adumbrates the chilly classrooms and lonely dormitories; or the matter-of-factness shown in the rough games, bullying and casual racism of the boys; the cold washes and poor food; and the peremptory visits and searches by the local militiamen or gestapo.

It's a harsh world, dictated by wartime exigencies. But here, somewhat uncharacteristically, Malle allows himself no directorial flourish nor digression. *Au Revoir les Enfants* is a bold rites-of-passage story of initiation into a world of moral uncertainty that is chastely free of exaggeration, histrionics and bombast. Rather, this is a world as viewed from, and true to, the point-of-view of the inquisitive, competitive, bookish and slightly arrogant Julien (a stand-in for the director): a young man for whom bed-wetting and bath-time erections signal a personal loss of childhood innocence, and for whom the slow discovery of the hidden Jewish identity of newcomer Jean is pointedly a matter of idle curiosity rather than a heart-tugging example of empathetic understanding.

If anything, it is this truth to character, along with the director's clear distaste for cliché, that gives *Au Revoir* its special quality. The performances, too, both by the boys and their 'masters', are uniformly impressive (with special mention for François Négret as the 'gammy-legged' kitchen porter Joseph). It may lack some of the provocative moral ambivalence that makes *Lacombe, Lucien* — his previous film set during the French occupation from 1974 — so powerfully alive. Nevertheless, it shows Malle laudably able to use the most direct of storytelling styles to survey a surprisingly rich array of complex subjects — friendship and betrayal, honour and guilt, collaboration and resistance, life versus art — without ever resorting to simplification or moral platitude. This is not Malle's greatest movie — despite its international status and its mangled fate as a teaching aid in French-language schools. But it's a very fine one which stands up strongly as the memory fades and the years go by. **WALLY HAMMOND**

ANTICIPATION. *Louis Malle's beloved tale of two schoolboys during Nazi-occupied France returns.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *Much better than ambivalent memories would suggest.* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *Not the director's best work, but far, far from being his worst either.* **4**

Beyond Clueless

Directed by **CHARLIE LYNE**
Starring **FAIRUZA BALK**
Released **23 JANUARY**

Beyond Clueless is the occasionally bewildering, often beguiling debut feature from filmmaker and journalist Charlie Lyne, whose dedication to the teen movie cause is not only beyond question, it could well be medically certifiable. His film is many things. Quite literally, in fact: Lyne spent a year sourcing footage from 220 movies from the 1990s to the early 2000s in order to achieve the full, phantasmagoric effect. The end result is an indulgent curio: a teenage daydream, an essay film and a cinephile pilgrimage of sorts.

The film's greatest secret, however, and perhaps its most illicit thrill, is that it's not really about teen movies at all. It's a testament of youth that cleverly hijacks the tropes and trickery of teen movies in order to explore the phases of adolescence in all their pubescent, sex-stained, apocalyptic glory. What's more, while the chapter headings suggest some kind of quasi-literary structure, *Beyond Clueless* is no John Green style fantasia; rather, the film is a descent into Hell.

It's significant that a number of the clips seem to be mined from horror films, titles like 1998's *Disturbing Behavior* and 1997's *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. The conclusions aren't exactly profound (*Idle Hands* is about masturbation, *Ginger Snaps* is about menstruation), but the realisation of teen life as sheer, unadulterated horror is a fun and radical conceit that Lyne grabs by the horns. This demonic spirit is reinforced by an outstanding original score by Summer Camp: it hums, purrs, rumbles and shrieks in all the right places.

Lyne's narrator of choice for this macabre chronicle is Fairuza Balk, herself a teen movie veteran as one of the stars of 1996 witchcraft parable *The Craft*. The opening sequence in *Beyond Clueless* presents *The Craft* as a paean to non-conformity, setting the tone (studious, academic, maybe just a little too obvious) for much of what follows. Alas, Balk's sultry timbre clashes with the earnestness of Lyne's script, and the narration often ends up simply pointing out what's happening on-screen. As a result, some of *Beyond Clueless* feels like listening to a Wikipedia entry read aloud by an expert chanteuse.

Having said that, there's plenty of joy in seeing this material projected and reflected in the same place, and the film works best when Lyne's natural irreverence sneaks in through the cracks. The moment when he skewers *13 Going on 30* is dazzlingly on point, while his clinical dismemberment of both *Jeepers Creepers* and *Eurotrip* (and their respective gay subtexts) is particularly gratifying. And the director's general enthusiasm for lesser known, under-the-radar fare like *Josie and the Pussycats* and *Slap Her, She's French!* (neither of which should ever be screened to a paying audience again) is both admirable and strangely infectious. Audiences could probably manage without a second "orgasm" montage, however, which is coupled with that shot of Danny Dyer indulging in a little self-reflection in *Human Traffic*. Now that's real horror. **CHRIS BLOHM**

ANTICIPATION. *A very personal take on an unheralded sub-genre.*	**3**
ENJOYMENT. *Lyne's enjoyable debut offers a robust dissection of the teenage psyche, albeit one undertaken with a blunt knife.*	**4**
IN RETROSPECT. *Scattershot, sure, but still lots to admire.*	**3**

Interview by **CHARLIE LYNE** *Illustration by* **LAURÈNE BOGLIO**

Blair Hayes

The maker of *Beyond Clueless* tracks down the director of the Jake Gyllenhaal-starring teen comedy, *Bubble Boy*.

I spent most of 2013 revisiting the teen movies of my youth, poring over their flaws and idiosyncrasies in search of material for my debut feature, *Beyond Clueless*, an essay film about teen cinema built entirely from existing films. From the start, I was struck by the genre's duality: on the one hand, teen movies are fluffy ephemeral works calculated to deliver instant gratification; on the other, they're ingrained with all the social upheavals and sexual anxieties that make adolescence such a fraught experience.

One film close to my heart is *Bubble Boy*, the 2001 road movie starring Jake Gyllenhaal as an autoimmune-deficient teen named Jimmy, who sets out on an unconventional voyage of discovery encased within a germ-free plastic dome. I can still appreciate the film for its wacky comedy and sweet disposition, but now I also see it for the blistering exploration of adolescent turmoil it really is. I spoke to director Blair Hayes recently about *Bubble Boy*'s hidden depths.

LWLies: How did you wind up directing *Bubble Boy*?

Hayes: I was a commercials director and had become rather popular, but — to sound like a T-shirt — what I'd always wanted to do was direct. I read the script for *Bubble Boy* in 1999, and I thought it was like *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, which was one of my favourite films at that point. The next thing I knew, I was over at Disney Studios talking to executives and explaining my vision of the film. I told them I wanted to make an intelligent stupid film, and I think that's what I did.

In the film, Jimmy's bubble is less a physical reality and more a symbolic representation of the fear that all teenagers feel as they navigate puberty.

That certainly makes a lot of sense to me. The entire movie is one big metaphor for a young person's fears of moving on and getting out — only in this case, those fears are exacerbated by the fact that Jimmy can't breathe air or eat regular food. It's a cartoon caricature where teenage anxieties are multiplied by a factor of 100.

As a teenager, I could definitely relate to Jimmy's simultaneous fascination with, and fear of, his changing body. In the midst of my own sexual awakening, I remember feeling terrified that I might actually get what I wanted. Do you think you brought your own experience of adolescence to the film?

I probably did. There was more than one moment during filming where I became overwhelmed by emotion and started crying for no apparent reason. At one point I had to leave the room, and Jake said, 'What's wrong? What's wrong?' and I said, 'I don't know.' So it obviously touched some kind of nerve, but I didn't want to dig too deep because I was supposed to be working and there I was, having an emotional breakdown.

For me his two best performances are in *Bubble Boy* and *Zodiac*. Incidentally, his dad in *Bubble Boy* is played by John Carroll Lynch, who also plays the prime suspect in *Zodiac*.

It's tough for me to see him in things like *Nightcrawler*, because I think he still looks like a kid. He's still got those wide, quasi-anime eyes, which are what attracted me to him in the first place. Because, quite frankly, I thought I was making a cartoon and I wanted cartoony-looking people to be in it.

Was there ever a conflict with Disney about the film's tone?

Well, I wanted Jimmy's costume to be like the clothing in *Edward Scissorhands*, full of blacks and browns, but a guy at the studio said, 'kids react to bright colours,' and that's how he ended up with orange pants and a yellow striped shirt. I had a way different idea for the poster too. So it certainly wasn't represented exactly how I would've liked.

I do think certain films benefit from misrepresentation though, because they end up reaching an audience — and I bunch my teenage self in with this — that wouldn't necessarily go and see a movie marketed as 'cerebral', but can still appreciate what that movie has to say.

I think there's definitely a truth to that. And it's even easier to watch *Bubble Boy* by accident because it's always on TV. It practically runs on a loop on Comedy Central

A Most Violent Year

Directed by **JC CHANDOR**
Starring **OSCAR ISAAC, JESSICA CHASTAIN, ALBERT BROOKS**
Released **23 JANUARY**

Statistically, 1981 was an especially violent year for the citizens of New York. Back then, in the early days of the Reagan era, the city was far from the gentrified metropolis we know today — homicide rates were at an all-time high, with white flight, a spike in unemployment brought on by industrial decline and an equally sharp rise in drug-related crime all contributing to the malaise. Determined to rise above the rot is Abel Morales (Oscar Isaac), a self-made businessman on the verge of acquiring a factory that would give his oil company an edge over the competition.

As shrewd as he is single-minded, it seems as if nothing is going to stand in Morales' way. Pretty soon, however, he falls into a spot of financial and legal bother, and the foundations of his empire suddenly don't appear as sound as before. There's a more immediate threat to his operation — someone is hijacking his trucks, selling off the stock and leaving his drivers battered and shaken. Something has to be done, but Morales would sooner sit back and try to ride out the storm than go against his better judgement and arm his workforce, potentially putting his employees and the public at greater risk.

With his neatly coiffed bouffant, knee-length camel hair coat and elegant, headstrong wife (Jessica Chastain) and shady right-hand man (Albert Brooks) invariably by his side, Morales fits the description of an archetypal on-screen crook. But this is not your typical big city crime drama. Morales is more Serpico than Scarface. His interpretation of the American Dream is decidedly straight-laced. He sermonises about taking the path that's "most right", about doing the honourable thing even when those around you are imploring you to take more drastic measures. So why does everything about him somehow seem disingenuous?

Writer/director JC Chandor previously provided a stark cross-section of social and economic decay with 2011's *Margin Call*, yet his spiritual follow up lacks the bite and conviction of its predecessor. The basic premise — what if the chief protagonist in a gangster movie was a dyed-in-the-wool pacifist? — is intriguing enough, but despite Oscar Isaac's best efforts, Morales manages to come across as phony even when protesting his innocence and declaring himself to be a man of high moral values.

Perhaps the point of *A Most Violent Year* is not to take things at face value — David Oyelowo's detective, for instance, is introduced as a principled law-and-order man before revealing himself to be no less flawed than the individual he is pursuing. If that's the case, however, why does Chandor appear so committed to showing us that capitalism and the endless pursuit of personal fortune don't necessarily breed corruption; that contrary to the popular idiom, nice guys occasionally finish first? It just doesn't add up. If the film does eventually arrive at a single, universal truth, it's a depressingly familiar one: while the weak perish, the strong prosper. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION. *Anything with Oscar Isaac in is surely worth a look.*	**4**
ENJOYMENT. *Atmospheric, measured and strangely disaffecting.*	**3**
IN RETROSPECT. *JC Chandor is fast becoming one of America's most intriguing and unpredictable filmmakers.*	**3**

The Duke of Burgundy

Directed by **PETER STRICKLAND**
Starring **SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN, CHIARA D'ANNA, MONICA SWINN**
Released **20 FEBRUARY**

Love can be a cruel mistress, as British director Peter Strickland so exquisitely illuminates in this startlingly beautiful piece of Euro erotica. The shifting nature of long-term relationships is explored through a couple with a fetish for butterflies and S&M and it's a sumptuous, spellbinding, sensory experience. Cynthia (Sidse Babett Knudsen) and Evelyn (Chiara D'Anna) inhabit a sequestered abode in an unnamed European town which is occupied only by women. They spend their days playing sex games, studying butterflies and cycling to a grand etymology institute where they listen intently to lectures.

Seductive and sensitive by turns, Strickland sinuously studies Cynthia and Evelyn's pairing with elegance, style and a frank emotional honesty. He places their activities under a microscopic lens, switching perspectives, opening up their bond for dissection and digging deep into their fantasies and feelings. They appear to be forever shackled to one another in an isolated autumnal conservatory which cages them in an eerie universe. Strickland applies the same level of precision and dedication to vigorously studying their kinky routines as a Lepidopterist does to investigating the fragile wings of a butterfly.

Strickland's previous feature, *Berberian Sound Studio*, played with *giallo* tropes through sound. In *The Duke of Burgundy*, the director once again subverts expectations with the teasing of flesh exposing underlying woes. We first meet the couple as they are engaged in a servant and master ritual which provides an unnerving glimpse into their lifestyle. Evelyn peeks through keyholes at her lover undressing and a teasing of flesh is shown but, just as in Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour*, there is no actual nudity. Instead, the many layers of their relationship are peeled away to reveal universal truths which surface through their unabashed role-play.

Evelyn's inexhaustible appetite for masochistic pleasure weighs heavily on Cynthia's mind, with her aching guilt and dissatisfaction eventually piercing through the eroticism. Role-playing is occasionally replaced with reality, but compromise for this couple proves to be a delicate and uneasy affair. It's not all heavy petting and deep emotional turmoil, however, with Strickland underpinning his rich and rewarding meditation on love with a mischievous sense of humour. Absurd visual jokes are dotted throughout; look out for the randomly placed mannequins in the lushly designed lecture halls and the credits sequence which lists "Perfume by Je Suis Gizella."

In terms of attention to detail and intensity *The Duke of Burgundy* recalls Walerian Borowczyck's much maligned *La Marge* and proves to be just as mesmerising and melancholic. The dreamy, intoxicating aesthetic is complemented by the feverish and otherworldly soundtrack provided by musical duo Cat's Eyes. Strickland cites Jess Franco's erotic cinema as a visual influence, and that's clear throughout, even though his vision is far more sophisticated and striking.
KATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN

ANTICIPATION. *The strange vices of Peter Strickland have proven enchanting so far.*	**4**
ENJOYMENT. *An unconventional love story wrapped up in a sexy skin.*	**5**
IN RETROSPECT. *So impressive... So perverse.*	**5**

National Gallery

Directed by **FREDERICK WISEMAN**
Released **9 JANUARY**

The same shot pattern recurs, like a refrain, throughout the nearly three hours of Frederick Wiseman's *National Gallery*. It's a simple shot-reverse shot, beginning with a museumgoer in close-up, eyes directed offscreen, followed by a cut to a frame-filling close-up of a painting, and a cut back to a different viewer — and on it goes. Like an early, playful experiment with continuity editing, the cuts stitch together observer and purported observee, and the loop stays open as Wiseman hopscotches back and forth from Italian Renaissance scenes and Hans Holbein's court paintings, to students with sketchbooks and seniors with audio guides. It's a democratic array of faces leaning in closer, shifting their weight, smiling knowingly, whispering kissily in their companion's ear — a potentially inexhaustible recombination of contemplator and contemplated.

For his 41st feature film, the documentary godhead has bent his observational, open-ended style to an especially well-suited subject. As always, there is no onscreen identifying text, no talking heads or voiceovers, just *vérité*-style footage filmed by a small crew: What He Sees Is What You Get. But what Wiseman sees, in this case, is many people who are differently, effusively adept at interacting with art. It's a pleasure to listen to the museum's docents tailor their spiels — historical scene-setting for adult tours, analogies to other arts for school groups, stories for kids, with detail provided in illustrative cutaways.

"He is unlike his colleagues in that he does show all strata of society," the leader of an art appreciation workshop for the blind says of Pissarro, just before a cut — hardly the only time Wiseman emphasises a comment equally applicable to his own cinema. Though viewers acclimated to direct-address in documentaries may find his style initially disorienting, Wiseman, in his role as editor, asserts his authorship of the footage he accumulates. From a budget meeting in which museum administrators discuss tightened spending limits and staff redundancies, we get a smash cut to a lecturer presenting a slide of one of Turner's Carthage paintings: 'Here is The Decline of the Empire'.

A major focus throughout Wiseman's career has been the everyday interactions on which social institutions run, and given the unadorned purity of his raw material, there is an acute duality in his films which are both specific interventions into contemporary debates and near-abstract studies. So museum director Nicholas Penny's scholarly, slightly pained presence in marketing strategy sessions speaks to the pragmatics barely behind the curtain at any large cultural organisation, in a way that's of a piece with the oeuvre of the American director of *High School, Hospital, Zoo,* et al. But this is also surely a more direct engagement with the politics of arts funding and the role of public and private money in Cameron's Britain; the scene of Penny personally conducting a private tour of his prized acquisition, 'Diana and Actaeon,' for a donor may provide some insight into his decision to step down, announced the month after *National Gallery*'s Cannes premiere.

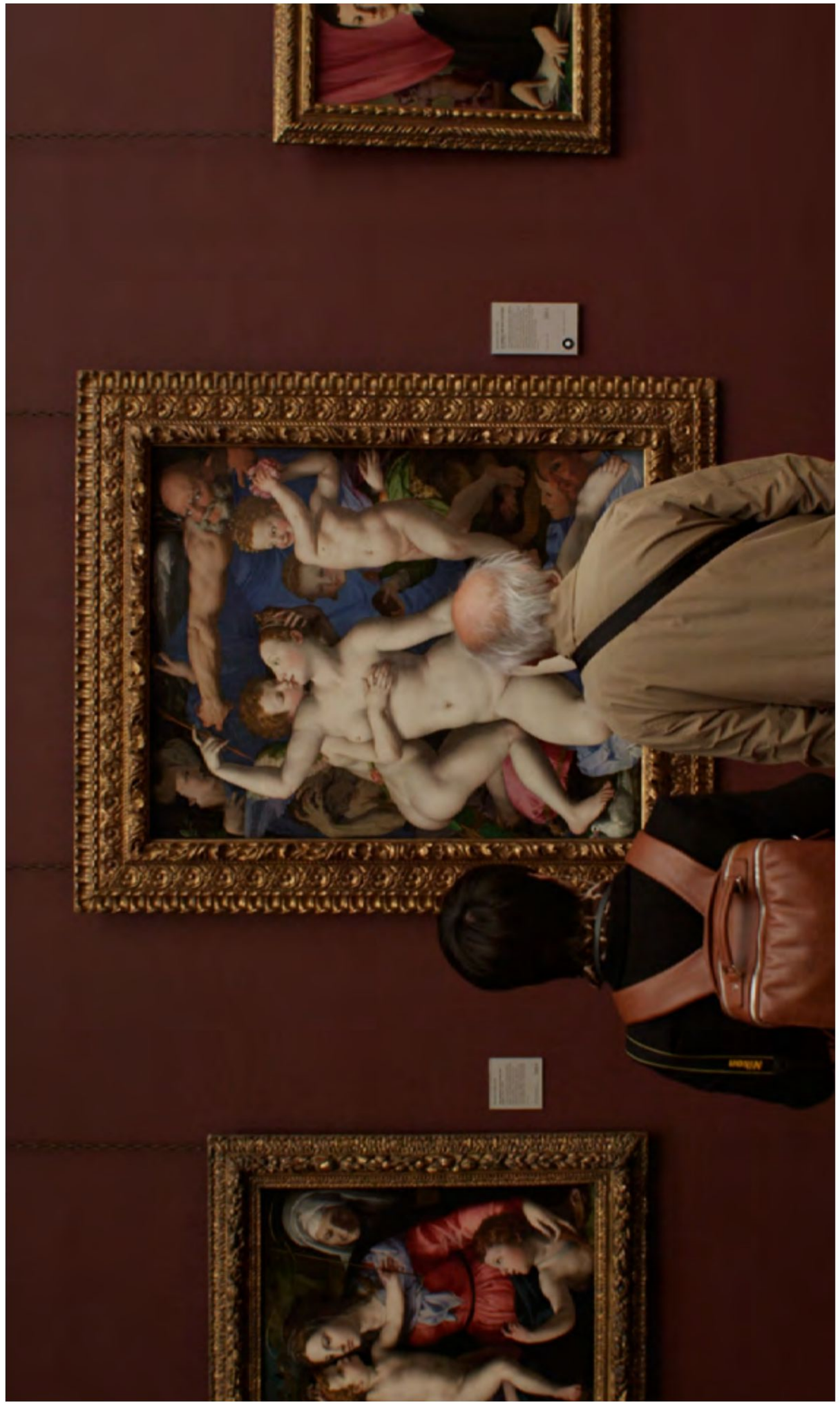
But while this is important to acknowledge, it's obvious that Wiseman's films, with their monolithic titles, are built to outlast any specific resonance — though this is true of *National Gallery* in a different way than of 1969's *Law and Order,* say, with its axiomatic urban beat cops. When art restorer Larry Keith talks engrossingly about varnishes, degrading materials and ambiguous intention, it's possible to forget, for several minutes at a time, that the object in the corner of the frame, over which he brushes his fingers so casually, is Velázquez's 'Christ in the House of Martha and Mary.' The canvas isn't peripheral — we are. As Keith goes on to say, a principal guiding his life's work is that anything he does, future generations should be able to reverse in 15 minutes if it turns out they know better than we did how the painting should be preserved.

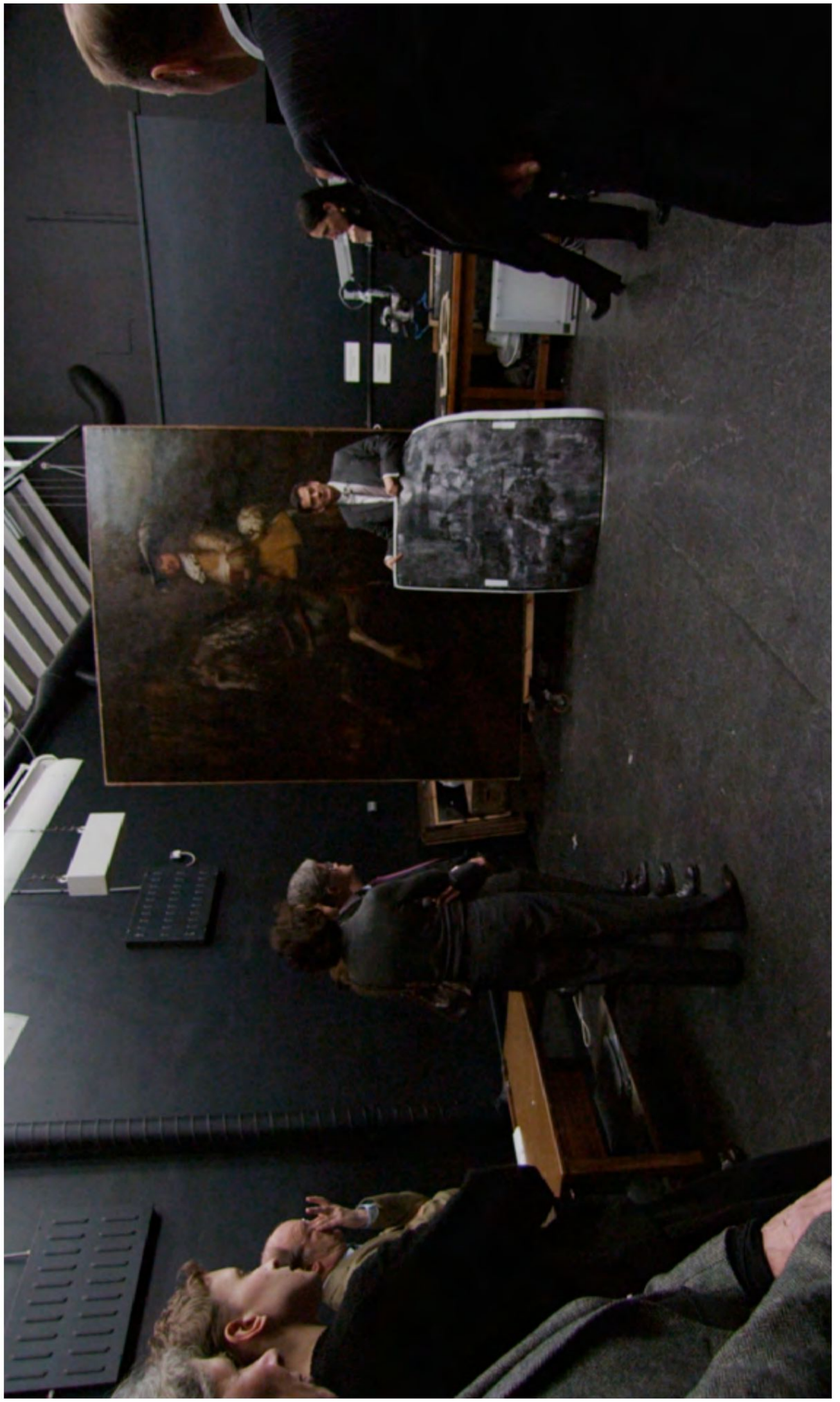
Increasingly in Wiseman's arrangement of the material, docents are heard to remark on a painting's mystery or changeability, and indeed the grand diversity of perspective in *National Gallery* — all those people, all those gazes — becomes a commentary on art's infinitude. The film's final minutes spiral outward into wings of the museum previously barely glimpsed, detouring to take in poetry and dance performances inspired by paintings we've already examined from multiple angles, before ending in a sequence of portraits, culminating with Rembrandt's 'Self Portrait at the Age of 63', the Old Master returning our gaze and involving artist, artwork and audience in a discourse spanning five centuries, and surely beyond. **MARK ASCH**

ANTICIPATION. *No Wiseman film is less than fascinating, but will art appreciation be a waste of his talents?* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *Three hours is hardly a long time to spend in the presence of great art.* **5**

IN RETROSPECT. *Wiseman shows us the "how" of art appreciation, from politics to philosophy, in a film vast in scope, and richly suggestive in insight.* **5**





Interview by **MATT THRIFT** *Illustration by* **RIIKKA SORMUNEN**

Frederick Wiseman

LWLies meets the veteran master of verité documentary as he muses on his latest work, *National Gallery*.

"*National Gallery* is the most abstract film I've made. You may watch it and learn a little bit about restoration say, which is certainly important, but the real issues of the film are the more abstract ones. A movie, when it works, operates in the space between the literal and the abstract. Literal, as in who says what to whom, and abstract as in what is suggested by the choices and the arrangement of the literal sequences, so you can reach the metaphorical aspects of the material.

"I've always been interested in comparative forms, and it influences the way I edit the material. There's one sequence in *National Gallery* where a young guide talks about a painting in which a friar is killed, making reference to the ways you tell stories in paintings and in movies. He brings up a poem by Auden, noting the similarity in content across the two forms, people's indifference to tragedy as Icarus falls out of the sky and the woodcutters who look away as the friar is murdered.

"I'm currently working on a ballet adaptation of my first film, *Titticut Follies*, and have chosen around 15 sequences with a choreographer to be translated into dance. I have no interest in doing a literal version of the film, and those sequences just serve as jumping off points for the dance, with a lot coming out of improvisation and interpretation. With a documentary you're confined to the literal, whereas with dance you can leap straight to abstraction, straight into a metaphor with the merest suggestion of the literal. In documentary you can't really get inside someone's head, unless they happen to be talking — about their fantasies, say — but with dance, you can get inside someone's fantasy world immediately.

"I think I've learned more about filmmaking from thinking about how the same issues are dealt with in other forms. When Ionesco or Flaubert write about the act of writing, I read it as though they're talking in general terms about film editing. They may be abstract problems they're talking about, but it helps me. I can't say that a particular cut relates to something I've read, but it helps me to read people's thoughts on problems I can relate to when I'm editing.

"I decided early on — where it was possible, depending on the lens and the size of the painting — to show as many of the paintings as possible without the frames, the wall or the little identification plaques. For me the painting became less of an object on display and much more alive if it filled the frame. I'd say about 80 per cent of the paintings discussed are shown that way. When you look at a painting you take it in all at once, but in a movie you can break that painting down into its component parts, or you can tell the story serially. I tried to do that for the sequences that I thought most important. One of the most important aspects of the film is how you tell a story in different forms. I'm making a movie about paintings which tell stories one way, in a film which tells its stories in another.

"It can be pretty daunting, having 170 hours of footage to get through. But it's not long before the pace accelerates and I find myself working seven days a week. Sometimes I look at the rushes in the order in which they're shot. Often I just look to get myself interested in the material. One thing I do if I'm having trouble is to head to the sequences I think are most likely to make it into the film. It doesn't mean they will, but I find it's a good place to start if I'm struggling to find an interest in the material.

"The switch to digital a few years back was a necessary evil. I still think film looks better, even if digital is getting pretty good, given how much you can do with colour correction now. I was accustomed to editing on film, having done it for 40 years and I long for its return, which will never happen.

"Maybe it's a sentimental attachment, but at the risk of sounding pretentious, there's something artisanal about handling film, which I liked. While digital is allegedly faster, it really isn't. You still have to make the choices, the machine won't do it for you. You still need to take the time to think. Digital doesn't give you more choices, it just gives you access to the material faster. It doesn't help you to make better choices, and speed can be the enemy of good decisions.

"Of course, it's a whole different issue when it comes to preservation. The received wisdom is that digital media is only good for five years, so people are now transferring back to 16 or 35mm, which then wipes out a good percentage of the budgetary savings you've made by shooting digital. It costs $30-40,000 to strike a print, depending on how long the film is. I've shot three films digitally, and I've not figured out what to do with them yet"

Wild

Directed by **JEAN-MARC VALLEE**
Starring **REESE WITHERSPOON, LAURA DERN, GABY HOFFMANN**
Released **16 JANUARY**

The Oscar Reece Witherspoon won for *Walk the Line* must be getting awfully lonely on that shelf. One intuits as much from this trial-by-nature biopic about a former drug addict who turned her train-wreck life around by walking the 1100 mile Pacific Crest Trail then writing a book about it. Witherspoon braves the elements, looks unkempt in hiking gear, does artistic nudity during the character's bad-girl moments, and generally approaches redemption via an Academy Awards showcase. Just watch her when this hill-walking newbie loads her pack with so much gear, she can't get it off the floor. But she tries, she struggles, and, by golly, she makes sure she we notice her doing it.

Having optioned Cheryl Strayed's memoir at galley stage, Witherspoon's evidently the moving force here, and you wonder whether French-Canadian director Jean-Marc Vallée's feat of guiding Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto to sundry awards last year landed him this gig. Probably not, given the location shooting the summer of 2013, but merely asking the question seems to chime with a general tone of contrivance.

How contrived? Has any human being on this earth ever uttered the line, "I'm going to walk myself back to the woman my mother thought I was"? That's perhaps the most blatant clunker in Nick Hornby's screenplay adaptation, which threads in contextualising flashbacks every other step of the way as the determined protagonist sets herself against an implacable landscape. Presumably, this is supposed to make us care for Cheryl in a way we never really did for Mia Wasikowska in the thematically similar Aussie female solo-trek saga *Tracks*, but what it actually accomplishes is to stop us experiencing the ebb and flow of Witherspoon's unfolding journey, draining the story of the sense of hard-won accomplishment we need to feel if we're to buy its life-changing effect.

Where the ambiguity and ambivalence of Emile Hirsch's doomed wayfarer in Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* at least allowed the viewer to figure out just what they thought about him, that work's already laid out here in a too-neat equation whereby finishing the walk will boost Cheryl's self-confidence so she can accept her painful past and move on. Vallée's slinky editing skills are certainly on display as he shows us the flickers of memory glinting through Witherspoon's present travails, with an affecting Laura Dern leaving the strongest impression as the mother whose hopes of improving her own chaotic domestic lot offers signposted foreshadowing of the narrative to come. Any hint, however, of capturing the true quicksilver quality of interior monologue is kiboshed by parcelling out her backstory in neat sequential gobbets as she ventures along the path. Of course, we feel her isolation, her understandable wariness about being a lone woman fearful of male sexual predators, but the film lacks the aesthetic courage to render the open-air duration which might allow us communion with her feat of endurance. In the end, *Wild* is just so tame and pre-packed it's hardly worthy of its title. **TREVOR JOHNSTON**

ANTICIPATION. *Intriguing true-life material, a capable film-maker and Reese Witherspoon at her flintiest.*	**4**
ENJOYMENT. *Everyone's trying so hard, but the whole approach is synthetic beyond salvation.*	**2**
IN RETROSPECT. *Obvious Oscar-bait is just that. Way too obvious.*	**2**

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Snow in Paradise

Directed by **ANDREW HULME**
Starring **FREDERICK SCHMIDT, MARTIN ASKEW, DAVID SPINX**
Released **13 FEBRUARY**

Dave (Frederick Schmidt, who made his debut film appearance in 2014 in David McKenzie's prison drama, *Starred Up*) is a comparatively innocent member of an east London crime family. His biggest concern when we first meet is hipsters. A comic opening has him peering through the window of a stylish coffee shop. "Look at them!" he says. British editor-turned-director Andrew Hulme cuts to an interior shot of people frozen under the glow of a multitude of MacBooks. The sight plumbs the same comic absurdity found behind the floor-to-ceiling glass in Jacques Tati's modernist satire, *Playtime*.

Dave is en route to a job working for his Uncle Jimmy (co-writer Martin Askew) and is bringing along a mate, Tariq (Aymen Hamdouchi), an affable Islamic chap who vocalises concern about the shady business. If Dave is a kid in this world then Tariq is a newborn. His voicemail message is a self-penned rap that combines the charming optimism of youth with the comedic power of misplaced confidence. Hulme excels at creating an endearing aura around his characters. They are real humans rather than 2D mobster archetypes, and this is vital once it becomes clear *Snow In Paradise* is, at least partially, a cut-throat gangster drama.

It swiftly becomes apparent that Dave is out of his depth. Having the ability to turn on a foul-mouthed laddish posture does not equate to clinical business inclinations. Beneath his muscular physicality and loud mouth is a soul. Hulme finds tension in an ironic paradox. The humanity that enables us to root for Dave makes him vulnerable to Jimmy. Askew gives us the most terrifying of psychopaths: one that — like Daniel Henshall's cheerily malevolent John Bunting in *Snowtown* — is calm but always gives off the sense that he is totally insane and liable to explode.

Another layer of intrigue emanates from the Islamic temple that Dave initially enters in search of Tariq. As life becomes more hazardous, emphasised with the oppressive, bass drone of the score, the temple becomes — along with a matter-of-factly presented drug habit — his escape. Hulme is admirably balanced in his depiction of religion, more interested in teasing out the contrasting philosophies and lifestyles at work in east London than in neatly judging and filing. He is equally restrained when it comes to showing the violence of the crime world. There's a suitcase that carries the same meaning as a box in *Se7en* which we never see inside. Equally, a girlfriend's profession is telegraphed in an elegant and elliptical scene. As the central performer in virtually every scene, Schmidt is sympathetic and plausible as a soft soul in a hard body. As an increasingly distressed Dave flounders between family loyalty and his own moral code, the film begins to ask spiritual questions. Themes take over from narrative tightness at a certain point, but Dave's dilemmas and the question of how they will resolve compels right to the bitter end. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *We've learned to be fairly cautious of British gangster movies.*	**2**
ENJOYMENT. *A British gangster movie, yes, but of the socially, theologically and philosophically nuanced variety.*	**4**
IN RETROSPECT. *A progressive reinvention of a tired genre.*	**4**

Son of a Gun

Directed by **JULIUS AVERY**
Starring **ALICIA VIKANDER, BRENTON THWAITES, EWAN MCGREGOR**
Released **30 JANUARY**

Son of a Gun is less a swaggering, pistol-packing progeny and more like the slightly weedy, none-too-smart offspring of superior bruisers such as *Heat* and *Animal Kingdom*. Writer/director Julius Avery makes his feature debut with a sometimes risible Aussie thriller notable for its kinetic camerawork, pacey action sequences and occasional comic flourishes but which is hugely hampered by its adherence to genre clichés, a routine lack of credibility and poorly thought through storyline.

But it's the casting of the charmless Brenton Thwaites in the lead role that is the film's biggest problem. Thwaites plays wide-eyed junior crook JR. That he is able to communicate such meagre brain activity sits ill with the fact that he's portrayed as being a chess whizz who, on arriving in prison for a short stretch, quickly enamours himself to notorious bank robber and fellow chess enthusiast, Brendan (Ewan McGregor).

In exchange for Brendan's protection inside, JR agrees to help him break out once he's released, which we witness during a sequence of staggering improbability. Despite his absence of experience and screaming lack of nous, JR then becomes integral to Brendan's criminal activity, playing a bizarrely pivotal part in a gold heist and entering into a dangerous, absurdly rose-tinted liaison with glamorous Eastern European moll Tasha (played by Swedish actress Alicia Vikander, who in a case of oddly contrasting casting is showing more pluck and less leg as wartime heroine Vera Brittain in *Testament of Youth* [see review on page 50].

As well as taking inspiration from the aforementioned crime thrillers, *Son of a Gun*'s rushed prison act suffers by comparison to the recent grimly authentic and startlingly compassionate *Starred Up*. Unlike his young co-star Thwaites, McGregor has screen charisma to spare; nevertheless he remains rather too affable throughout, lacking the lethal edge to cut it as a hardened criminal.

The film's double-crosses are dunderheaded and the romance is embarrassingly awful, with the reality of Tasha's situation with criminal boss Sam (Jacek Koman) skirted around in an insulting attempt to keep her a viable, basically 'clean' romantic option. We're told she's hooked up with the gang in order to secure citizenship; that this doesn't involve her having to sleep with anyone, just to strut around looking pretty at strip clubs and parties, seems extraordinarily unlikely.

Cinematographer Nigel Bluck, who got his schooling as the second unit DoP on the three *Lord of the Rings* films, is on hand to save the day, and his urgent, energetic and appealingly sun-kissed work holds your attention beyond the film's many far-fetched machinations. Avery has produced something that's superficially entertaining, occasionally amusing and that zips along, so while it stretches credulity at least it won't test your patience — however place *Son of a Gun* under even the most cursory scrutiny and it falls completely apart. **EMMA SIMMONDS**

ANTICIPATION. *A director with promise, an interesting role for Ewan McGregor.*	**3**
ENJOYMENT. *It's possible to watch it without your head falling into your hands...*	**3**
IN RETROSPECT. *...But give it a few minutes and that's where it'll end up.*	**1**

Into the Woods

Directed by **ROB MARSHALL**
Starring **ANNA KENDRICK, MERYL STREEP, CHRIS PINE**
Released **9 JANUARY**

Fairy tales, such a tired genre
Every film, like the one before
Fairy tales, full of worn-out clichés
It's time to say... Goodbye

There goes the witch wicked and cruel like always
The same foul hag we know too well
Every character the same,
Unprogressive and mundane
And the songs all sound the same...

Look there he goes that's Johnny Depp no question
In panto wolf garb can't you tell?
Never dull but still quite bad
Cause his cartoon schtick's old hat
Still at least he's gone before too long that Depp

Goodbye!
So long!
Can we go home now?
Goodbye!
So long!
We've had enough
Our pain, right now,
Is so intensive
There must be more to this insipid tripe!

Look there she goes that girl is so familiar
It's Anna Kendrick all is well
With a Cinderella look
That's more stage than storybook
Fingers crossed she'll be the one to break the spell

Oh! Isn't this amazing?
It's our favourite part because you'll see
Here's where she meets Prince Charming
But we won't discover if he's straight until act three

Now it's no wonder this was made by Disney
These films are such an easy sell
But behind its safe facade
Twisted pleasures to be had
Very different from the usual fluff
It's nothing like the usual fluff
Yes different from the usual fluff
Hurrah!

Right from the moment when Chris Pine starts splashing
Bare-chested by a waterfall
In this film there's only he
Who's as camp as camp can be
Did we mention he can sing a bit as well?

Look there, he goes, him off the telly
It's James, Corden, oh he's quite good!
There's more, to come, you won't believe it
This is such a fun, dark, weird, enchanting film
There's so much more to this than meets the eye!
Turns out it's not just some insipid tripe!

Look here's the deal it's better than expected
We're not too stubborn to admit
It's a pity and a sin, the songs are spread so thin
But this really is a joyous film
A delightful and surprising film
It really is a joyous film
Sondheim!

[To the tune of 'Belle' from *Beauty and the Beast*]
ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION. *Hard to get too excited about another Disney musical.* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *A spellbinding, star-studded triumph.* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *The songs will be stuck in your head for days.* **3**

Interview by **ADAM WOODWARD** *Illustration by* **LAURÈNE BOGLIO**

Anna Kendrick

The Into the Woods star tells *LWLies* why she's keen to give her vocal chords a rest after her latest exertions.

Having earned an Oscar nomination for her supporting role in Jason Reitman's 2009 film, *Up in the Air*, Anna Kendrick might have been forgiven for forging a career as a purely dramatic actress. What you might not know about Kendrick, however, is that she comes from a musical theatre background, her first acting role being the Broadway musical 'High Society' at aged 12. Which might explain why she's made a concerted effort to avoid the trappings of typecasting and find her true voice in feel-good musicals like *Pitch Perfect* — which spawned the hit single 'Cups' — and now Rob Marshall's big screen adaptation of the Stephen Sondheim musical, 'Into the Woods'. But with *Pitch Perfect 2* and another musical comedy/drama, *The Last 5 Years*, both set for release in 2015, Kendrick in understandably keen to keep challenging people's expectations of her, as *LWLies* found out when we sat down with the candid 29 year old recently.

"When I was promoting *Up in the Air*, Rob Marshall and I met at a party and the first words out of his mouth were, 'When are we getting you back in a musical?' He's got a great knowledge of the musical theatre community and he knew I'd been in 'High Society' and knew I came from that background. But the general public didn't really see that side of me until *Pitch Perfect*. The singing thing wasn't really intentional though. Any half decent manager would tell you not to do four movies of the exact same genre in a row, but *The Last 5 Years* and *Into the Woods* are two of the greatest pieces of material ever in my opinion. So it was not the time for me to get all logical about it. I mean, come on, it's playing Cinderella in a Disney version of a [Stephen] Sondheim musical. Not only am I *not* going to pass up, I'll kill a bitch for it.

"Singing in a movie brings so much added pressure to it. Having to constantly be thinking about your voice, if you're looking after it correctly, is the worst. It's funny because obviously I've never been an athlete or anything like that, so the idea of training and taking care of my body is not really in my physical vocabulary. I wasn't really sure what to do with myself, other than, like, drink camomile tea and get a lot of sleep. It was kind of stressful. And then of course stress is really related to your voice... I just tried not to drive myself crazy about it. I don't have classical training, so I listened to a lot of singers on YouTube — you know when you go down a YouTube rabbit hole and end up with no idea where you started? It felt like trying to find an accent, which is not a legitimate technique, but it was just the best I could do. We had an amazing musical team on this, so I knew I had people watching out for me. But I was kind of making it up as I went along. Finding Cinderella's vocal range was a strange journey, it was something I ended up finding by just walking around my flat.

"What I had to consciously do after *Up in the Air* was not play a slew of uptight, cold, vulnerable characters, because oh man did I get every one of those scripts. I was in this weird place of being offered a tonne of work but it felt like I was getting offered no work at the same time. Even *50/50*, which was the first thing I did after *Up in the Air*, I feel like I pulled a little hat-trick, where on paper the character was a little more cold and more like *Up in the Air*, and I had to turn her into an overly helpful, warm, heart-on-her-sleeve type of character, which everybody was happy with. I felt like, 'I know why you hired me to do this and I'm going to do something different'. But no matter who you are and how many roles you've played, people will always offer you the last thing that you did. That's just the way it is. There's a lot of male roles that I want to play — I want to be Leo Frank in 'Parade' and I want to be Henrik in 'A Little Night Music'. But I would be hard pressed to think of a musical that would make me want to do another one, because then I think people would start to get really sick of me."

American Sniper

Directed by **CLINT EASTWOOD**
Starring **BRADLEY COOPER, SIENNA MILLER, LUKE GRIMES**
Released **16 JANUARY**

To shoot or not to shoot? When we first see Navy SEAL sniper Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper) in Clint Eastwood's grippingly made yet ideologically muddled war film, he's faced with just such a conundrum. This is his first of four tours of duty in Iraq, and he has to quickly determine whether to put a bullet in a child who may or may not be carrying a bomb toward a Marine foot patrol. It's one of those horrible choices unique to combat, and by putting it upfront, Eastwood and screenwriter Jason Hall (adapting the real-life Kyle's book) imply that the film to follow will delve deeply in some tough moral questions.

That's true to a point: Kyle's ultimate decision in this terrible matter is deferred for half-an-hour or so while the movie flashes back to his Texas adolescence. It's an upbringing painted in broad brushstrokes and absents the oversaturated visual adornments with which Eastwood's frequent cinematographer, Tom Stern, typically composes. Simple or simplistic?: There's the macho father who instills a love of guns and America in Kyle. There are drunken nights out after the rodeo and a cheating girlfriend to kick to the curb. There's Kyle's chance encounter with Taya (Sienna Miller), the woman who will become his wife and mother his two children. And there's the 9/11 attacks (viewed in a quick cutaway to a news broadcast), which act as the impetus for Kyle's military career — during which time he will rack up the most confirmed kills of any United States serviceman in history.

It's difficult to say if Eastwood is being subtle or lazy with this straightforward parade of good-ol'-American-boy tropes, but the director's sober approach is intriguing. Kyle was a controversial figure, vocal about his commitment to Christ and country while reportedly augmenting his biography with tales of shooting a pair of Mexican carjackers and punching out former Minnesota governor/pro wrestler Jesse Ventura. The way the bulked-up Cooper plays him is much more minimalist. Kyle is a seething hulk with a thousand-yard stare who is clearly keeping his wartime agonies to himself. To do anything less would be a betrayal. This is a powerful one-note performance, so committedly opaque that you keep leaning forward, waiting for the steroidal armour to crack.

Eastwood doesn't shy away from showing the bloody horrors of war, especially when a spectral Taliban antagonist known as The Butcher (Mido Hamada) appears to punish the panicked Iraqi populace for consorting with the American invaders. Clint's a genre guy at heart, and he's at his best dutifully detailing the many skirmishes in which Kyle finds himself. On the homefront, the film is on less sure footing, especially in the way it treats Miller's character — a mere cipher who gets to be pregnant and worried and little else. There's also the matter of the abrupt finale, which plays with a rah-rah repulsiveness (in the blinkered vein of Peter Berg's atrocious *Lone Survivor*) that seems antithetical to the rest of the film. From studious nuance to distorted nationalism — it leaves a very bad taste. **KEITH UHLICH**

ANTICIPATION. *Clint Eastwood takes on the Iraq War.*	**3**
ENJOYMENT. *Impressive in the particulars, weaker on the whole.*	**3**
IN RETROSPECT. *Not the cleanest of kills.*	**3**

The Green Ray (1986)

Directed by **ERIC ROHMER**
Starring **MARIE RIVIÈRE, VINCENT GAUTHIER, AMIRA CHEMAKHI**
Released **2 JANUARY**

It is hard to express in a compelling, unhysterical fashion why Eric Rohmer's rhapsodic 1986 film, *The Green Ray*, stands among the headiest pinnacles of modern cinematic art. It's not a revolutionary film in any traditional sense of the word, and it's also a film whose modest concerns and production methods belie profound and intangible cosmic depths. Yet there are things about it — near-imperceptible touches and quietly radical formulations — which lend it a unique, quixotic quality which pushes it far above and beyond its contemporaries.

In the crudest sense, *The Green Ray* is about a young, tousle-haired Parisian secretary named Delphine (played by the mesmeric Marie Rivière) who, having recently been ditched by her boyfriend, finds it increasingly difficult to decide where she wants to go on holiday and thus naturally dispense of her woes. It adopts the form of a miniature, multi-chaptered odyssey about a woman in search of comfort, pleasure and companionship, but whose personal sense of basic satisfaction has been temporarily jolted out of synch.

The film also documents the simple stresses of going on holiday, a motif that's compounded via first-time, 22-year-old cinematographer Sophie Maintigneux's quaint and ironic picture-postcard compositions. Indeed, the production itself saw a skeleton technical crew visiting their old holiday haunts and real life family boltholes.

Rohmer has said that he has zero interest in making films which are based upon actual historical events, as television and news coverage have already amply packaged and delivered those stories. He makes films that mine poetry from the stuff that happens between events, the pauses between the words. His is a cinema not of actions, but of reactions. People talk to one another in an a manner of natural rather than affected confusion, and this film explodes the notion that one innocuous, non-life defining decision could be a vital pathway to a future of contentment. On paper, the film sounds like the sort of insipid index of first world problems which would incite revulsion, not empathy for our plucky, discombobulated heroine. And Delphine is not contrived as a character with which viewers are invited to instantly fall in love. Indeed, Rivière — with her kooky green beret and wild mood swings, delivering a canonical central performance — moulds Delphine in a manner which bravely envelops a compex catalogue of irksome human flaws.

The film's climax is astounding and entirely mysterious, comprising a Jules Verne-quoting (trick?) shot that serves to silence all those who say the director was only interested in dialogue. It's a moment that pierces the heart, purely and simply. And whatever ambivalent feelings you may harbour towards Delphine by the film's ticking-clock finale, only the sourest of misers would not concede her this personal little prophecy in the sky. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *One of the all-time greats gets a big screen run-out.*	**5**
ENJOYMENT. *A cinema of pure transcendence which echoes back to Bresson, Ozu and Dreyer.*	**5**
IN RETROSPECT. *A film which is at once nothing and everything.*	**5**

As told to **PAUL FAIRCLOUGH** *Illustration by* **LAURÈNE BOGLIO**

On Set... With Jacques Gites

Dispatch Number Six: *I'm Still Here* Pinewood Studios, 2009

FEATURE

Reputation is something one rarely seeks but it inevitably follows any individual in possession of some degree of talent — at least that's the lesson of my own modest experience. I can't count the number of times film industry figures have called on me for help of some variety or another, deaf to my protestations that I'm just a humble critic. Their grateful thanks, while warmly received, always seems unnecessary to me. So it was with my old golfing chum Sean Combs, probably better known to you as The Puff Daddy.

It was 2007, more than a decade after I'd first met The Puff Daddy while hanging with New York City graffiti artists for Bristol's 'Cool Beanz' magazine. Back then, Sean explained to me how he'd been fired from Uptown Records for being too fly and the chat we had about hip-hop led me, unwittingly, to write its manifesto for the future. I dropped the vandalism piece and instead filed some reportage on Sean's champagne–drenched visit to his Manhattan tailor, the now-notorious article 'Motherfuckah in Furs'. It was unsurprising, therefore, that it was me he telephoned when the world of rapping was about to get seismic once more.

"JG," he said. "This is The Puff Daddy. You recall your old, dear friend Joaquin Phoenix?" Of course I did. Sean told me that his shit was fucked up (his words). Jo-jo had apparently decided to retire from acting, grow a beard and shake the hip-hop world to its pumps with his phat rhymes. Only I, it seemed, could talk him down from this career stoop. With the Phoenix boy's prodigious talent, Sean could see the empire he'd built slipping through his gold-draped fingers like so much spilled Cristal. Would I help? The next morning I stepped out of LAX and into the sunshine of California — the wild, wild west: the state that's untouchable, like Elliot Ness. It was good to be back.

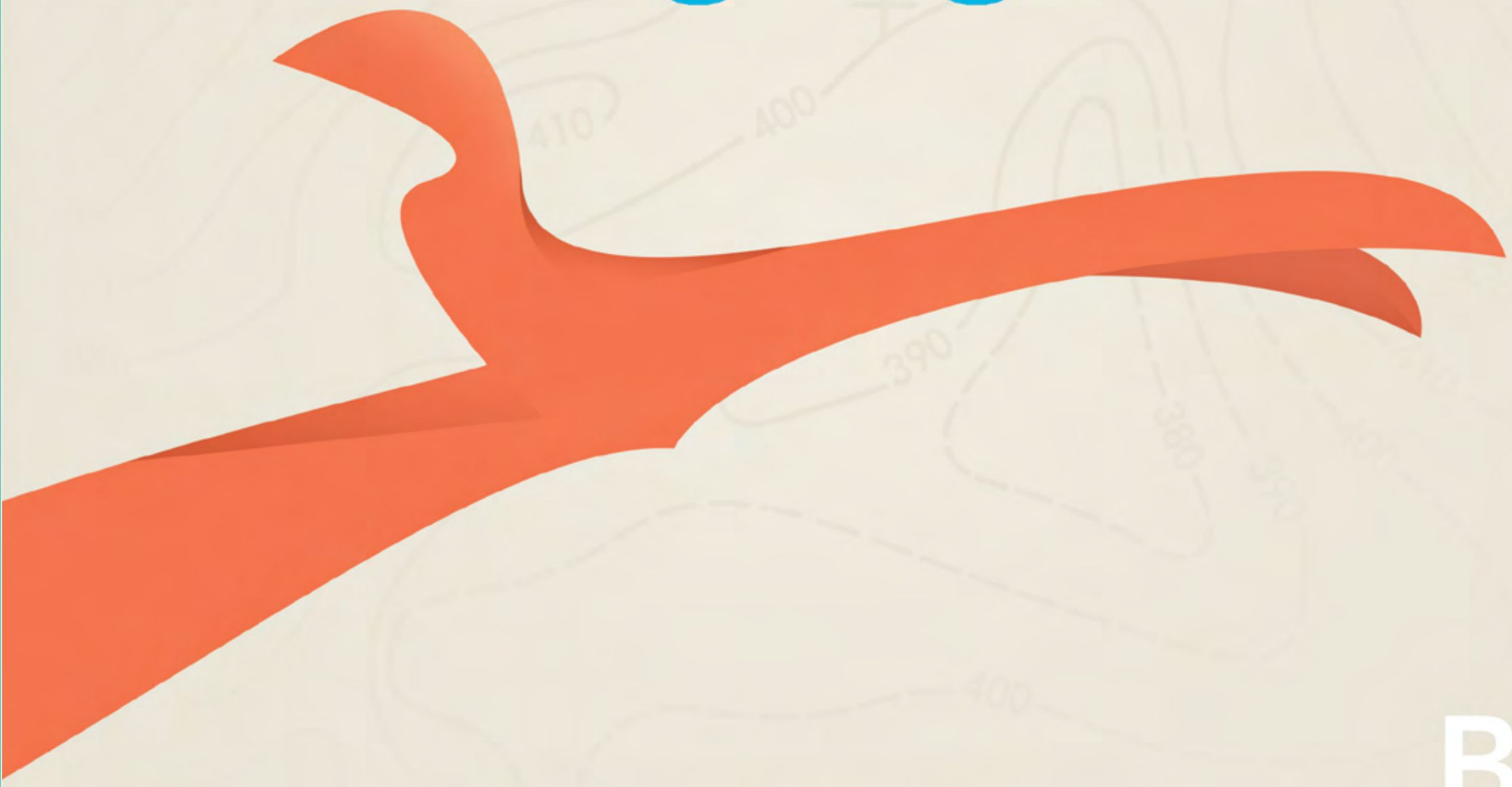
My long sojourn into the soul of Joaquin Phoenix was dark and often harrowing. Luckily I had come armed with some of my best anecdotes; over a few intensive days of boozy Richard Burton stories, recollections of my advice to Truffaut and doomed attempts to explain Marion Cotillard's obsession with model railways, I convinced the boy he was walking out on the greatest show on earth. With news that he had lost his shit (his words) all over Tinsel Town, we agreed to put together a movie and sell the whole thing as a cineastical experiment examining the nature of celebrity, the impermanence of fame and the nature of reality itself. The eventual result, *I'm Still Here*, speaks for itself.

But on the long flight home I was more troubled than I should have been. My trip had been a success and I had every right to feel satisfied with saving rap as well as the career of a fine screen actor. And yet I'd been forced to question the veracity of so much, including what we perceive as reality. If Jo Phoenix could make himself disappear so completely, were any of us more than an insubstantial invention? I was reminded of the story of a Buddhist monk who dreamed so vividly he was a butterfly that he was never again sure whether he was a monk who dreamed of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming it was a monk. How, I wondered, do any of us know if we exist at all?

Luckily these strange thoughts were interrupted by, of all things, a child. No older than eight or nine, she stood in the aisle of the plane and thrust a book at me. "Please, Mr Gites," she said. "I'm ever such a fan of yours and it would be just marvelous if you would sign it for me!" It was one of my earliest works, a hilarious account of when I shadowed director Federico Fabrizi during the famously troubled production of *The Gold of Cairo*. I couldn't help but smile, of course: here, as I waxed philosophical, a child had brought me down to earth with evidence, in black and white, of my own indelibility in the great story of man.

Later, waiting at Paddington station's taxi rank, it began to snow. A large flake floated lazily across my vision and came to rest on the tip of my nose; its coldness sent a thrill through me. Even if our existence is an illusion, I mused, it is a beautiful one. I was still here. In all the excitement, I'd forgotten it was Christmas

A.



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Pelo Malo

Directed by **MARIANA RONDÓN**
Starring **SAMUEL LANGE ZAMBRANO, SAMANTHA CASTILLO, BETO BENITES**
Released **30 JANUARY**

There's nothing in the plot description of *Pelo Malo* ('Bad Hair') that does justice to the subtlety of its writer/director Mariana Rondón's achievements. With two combustible lead performances and a vibrant representation of the high-rise life among Venezuela's working poor, Rondon leads an assured dance through universal themes of poverty, family and sexuality.

A lighter dance occurs between nine-year-old Junior (Samuel Lange Zambrano) and his grandmother, Carmen (Nelly Ramos). Knowing his predilection for singing, she tells him to whack on an old Henry Stephen vinyl, a rock 'n' roll hit called 'Mi Limón, Mi Limonero'. Carmen sings along in a startlingly baritone, shaking her ass like a teenager.

As with most encounters in this clever human drama, there is more to the situation than its superficial charms. Sure, Carmen is a loving granny inviting her charge to have some fun, but she's also trying to engage him in a more serious type of partnership. Rondón spaces out pivotal conversations between her cast, providing enough of them to enable understanding of key motivations but not so many that we stop searching body language for further clues.

The looks that Junior's mother Marta (Samantha Castillo) shoots her son zing along a spectrum which has maternal ferocity at one end and plain old ferocity at the other. Castillo delivers a fascinating, not always likeable performance. As a single mother harbouring suspicions about her son's sexuality, she is as obsessed with getting her old security guard job back as she is about hounding Junior for every queer thing that he does. Rondón's camera stalks the trio comprised of Junior, Marta and baby around a tiny apartment where no one can hide anything, be it sex or hair-straightening. Poverty proves the ultimate equaliser, forcing all family members into open space.

Castillo is given a lot of heavy lifting. The camera drinks in her youth, which, thanks to no make-up and a minimalist wardrobe is shown as incidental to a tiring life. In one sequence, she pulls on her only party dress, posing for a second but then furiously booting a piece of furniture. Marta is a pragmatist. Dreaming about another life interests her less than calculating survival.

As conflicted as her character is, this is Zambrano's film. The doe-eyed child is never a victim of his mother's frustration for he is as plucky as his hair is curly. His nascent homosexuality is telegraphed with the lightest of touches. *Pelo Malo* opens with Junior blissfully submerged in someone else's jacuzzi. It's sensual shorthand for the character's tendency to sink into pleasure. Rondón presents a film that via disciplined social realism earns the delightful sentiment that no one is too poor to get lost in the magnetic beauty of a crush's eyes. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *Something about hair, sexuality and a kid?*	**2**
ENJOYMENT. *Spirals out beautifully from intense personal matters to sprawling social colour.*	**4**
IN RETROSPECT. *Welcome to Caracas.*	**4**

Interview by **DAVID JENKINS** *Illustration by* **LAURÈNE BOGLIO**

Alex Garland

The British novelist and screenwriter talks to *LWLies* about his intriguing directorial debut, *Ex Machina*.

LWLies: A friend of ours who works in Google's robotics division told us that what they do is highly secretive. Did you encounter this secrecy when researching *Ex Machina*?

Garland: There are two main areas where these things are being researched: one is from public money from universities, so scientists at MIT or Imperial; two is private corporations such as Apple and Google, and a great many of the small ones are being bought up and amalgamated. In order to know what was going on I didn't need to go to Google. I could go to Imperial and those people are connected with those at Google. I was able to get a pretty clear sense of where things were at. And, in that clear sense, we are not at a place where people are saying, 'We're about to create a sentient AI.' So, that doesn't mean people aren't trying to do it in a serious way.

The suggestion in the film is that breakthroughs will happen through these small, secret enclaves where the real work is being done.

There are some very private institutions looking into this kind of thing. But they might be looking at it for a different area. So it might be to do with how an AI might be used to make a kill decision on a drone, rather than how it would become self aware. Where self awareness is concerned — unless some of those secretive organisations have made some serious breakthroughs in understanding of very high level computing and consciousness — they are not just about to do it. It's beyond winning the Nobel Prize. The consensus is: I haven't done it, no-one I know has done it, and no-one is about to do it.

It's interesting that the industry thrives against this tide of negativity.

It's something I find interesting, too. AIs in narrative are typically the bad guy. We're scared of them. We're paranoid about what they represent. I personally don't feel that way about AIs. I can see the potential dangers of it, but I think in reality the dangers would be more serious for the AI than to humans. That's kind of what the film is about: it's not an anti-AI movie, it's a pro-AI movie.

It struck us as very classical dramatic work.

Do you know the film *Sleuth*? I thought about *Sleuth* and the concept of shifting allegiances.

It did feel a little theatrical in that sense.

The thing that makes it theatrical, which is inherent to the form, is that you have people having conversations in one place. There's a limit to how many times you can swap around the set because it's distracting. Normally what happens in structural terms is there are an awful lot of scenes that are a set-up and maybe two lines of dialogue. Then, within that, there's a few scenes that are a bit longer, and you mostly get about three scenes in an entire movie that are more than a couple of pages long. This film isn't like that — there are lots of 11 page scenes. It's people talking in rooms, for almost the whole thing.

That's what the film is about.

I watched the original BBC TV versions of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *Smiley's People* with Alec Guinness. They're sensational. The drama in them is people talking in rooms. It's Smiley intuiting information out of people, and it becomes electrifying. I thought a lot about TV drama in general, because in the last couple of years, TV drama has been wiping the floor with cinema drama. If Tennessee Williams was alive today he'd be working in TV.

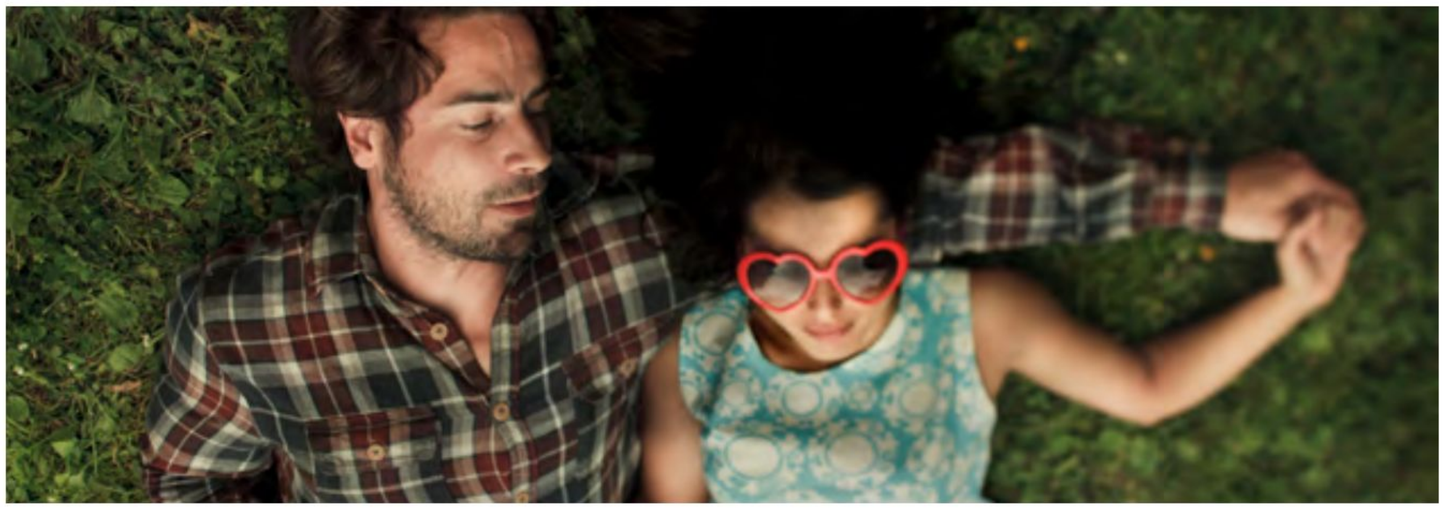
There are films like *Interstellar* which make that argument about a script's function in a movie harder to win, as it's all heavy exposition. *Ex Machina* seems to self-consciously want to avoid that.

Not exactly. All I tried to do is represent the arguments around AI as accurately as I could. The issues surrounding AI are very human issues. The ideas are connected to this are, a young man is tasked with assessing the level of consciousness within a machine. It's only because it's a machine that he's questioning it. If a human was behaving in that way he wouldn't question it at all. You take my consciousness for granted, but if you had to test me for it by asking questions, that suddenly becomes difficult. In the end, it turns inward and you start testing yourself. Those ideas don't require technical conversation. It's accessible, and that was seductive for me

Ex Machina is released 23 January. Head to littlewhitelies.co.uk to read our review.

I Am Yours

Directed by **IRAM HAQ**
Starring **AMRITA ACHARIA, OLA RAPACE, PRINCE SINGH**
Released **30 JANUARY**



Mina (Amrita Acharia) comes alive under the male gaze. The petite Norwegian-Pakistani beauty stomps through her unstructured life as a struggling actress and single mother until a man appears. Then the lights come on, a girlish smile flickers and the allure of rosy, young sex appeal is harnessed for a brief spell of graphically captured escapism.

Acharia possesses a full-bodied feminine charm usually found in titillating love interest roles. But in Iram Haq's partially autobiographical drama, these same seductive resources are shown as the character's only social tool. At her worst, Mina is unimaginative, desperate and dependent on male attention. By the disquieting and ambiguous end, Mina has sacrificed so much to a romanticised dream of togetherness that, like Blanche DuBois, she may have crossed a threshold into madness.

Haq strips away the mystique that immediately shrouds an attractive female lead. *I Am Yours* is readable as a social flare calling attention to the conflicts and intolerances that fuel Mina's rebelliousness. Haq films uncomfortably long and naturalistic scenes of Acharia sitting silently in a room where her prospects and decisions are disparaged. It's understandable if not commendable that she then seeks refuge in the carnal appreciation of strangers.

Mina's most repugnant quality is her increasing willingness to put the needs of six-year-old Felix (Prince Singh) beneath the call of hedonism. There are shades of Ursula Meier's *Sister* in the upsetting plight of a young boy quietly suffering a lack of care. Haq has the storytelling style of a lawyer calmly presenting the facts of a case leaving it to the audience to decide whether to focus judgment on Mina or unsympathetic circumstances. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

ANTICIPATION. *A debut that has been garnering respectful responses.*	**3**
ENJOYMENT. *Difficult to watch but that's the point*	**3**
IN RETROSPECT. *Iram Haq has an eye for character and setting.*	**4**

Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter

Directed by **DAVID ZELLNER**
Starring **RINKO KIKUCHI, NOBUYUKI KATSUBE, SHIRLEY VENARD**
Released **20 FEBRUARY**

Cast your minds back to the Coen brothers' 1996 film *Fargo*, where Steve Buscemi's ratty hood, clutching a weeping gunshot wound to the cheek, hurriedly buries a briefcase full of banknotes in the deep Minnesota snow somewhere along an anonymous country road. Now, return to present day, and "reality". Kumiko (Rinko Kikuchi) is a put-upon secretary in modern day Tokyo who self-identifies as a treasure hunter. With her rabbit sidekick, Bunzo, she spends her down-time trying to decipher cryptic maps, one of which leads her to a battered VHS copy of... *Fargo*.

Resuscitating the tape as best she can, she is able to spy through the electric mist a vision of a man burying a suitcase of cash. Fate has spoken: this is her next mission, and there's nothing that can stop her from completing it. Though it seems exactly like one of those movies which is far more fun to read about than it is to actually watch, credit must go to its makers, David and Nathan Zellner, for using this eccentric set-up as a way to discuss their own mystery: is Kumiko clinically insane to want to achieve this goal or is her odyssey any different from anyone seeking personal validation through some random achievement? And what is life if not a journey towards an ill-defined and probably non-existent goal? The reason why the film works so well is down to the immense empathy the Zellners extend to their characters.

Kumiko, a damaged young woman whose actions might be a reaction to her swaddling mother or sleazy boss, puts herself through immense psychological strain to reach her goal. The people she meets along the road are determined to help her despite having no real conception of what she wants, and this isn't just due to a sense of cultural alienation. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *David Zellner's previous film,* Kid Thing, *was ill-disciplined, but fun.*	**3**
ENJOYMENT. *A major step up. A road movie which transcends its ultra-quirky log-line.*	**4**
IN RETROSPECT. *Bunzo the rabbit is an icon in the making. Spin-off franchise all but assured.*	**4**

White God

Directed by **KORNÉL MUNDRUCZÓ**
Starring **ZSÓFIA PSOTTA, SÁNDOR ZSÓTÉR, 274 DOGS**
Released **27 FEBRUARY**

Presumably titled 'White God' because 'White Dog' was already taken, Hungarian director Kornél Mundruczó's high concept stunt drama, which took home the Un Certain Regard prize (its Palme Dog coup was far more deserved) at last year's Cannes Film Festival, is essentially *Spartacus* reimagined with a canine cast. Indeed, the film features no less than 274 hounds, who tear about the streets of modern-day Budapest wreaking havoc on the unsuspecting masters who have beaten, caged and trained them to fight for sport in seedy backstreet arenas.

Only 13-year-old trumpet-player Lili (Zsófia Psotta), it seems, is on the side of our poochy protagonists. When her beloved crossbreed Hagen gets booted out by her mean-spirited pa for no apparent reason when she goes to stay with him, Lili is determined to track down her best friend before he ends up like so many of the city's strays. Little does she know that Hagen's fate already appears to be sealed having been picked up by a local dog shelter where he's next in line to take the Long Sleep. But Hagen has other ideas. In an exhilarating sequence he breaks free and mobilises a small army of neglected mutts, an event the local authorities are inexplicably ill-equipped to deal with.

This is a unique premise executed with gusto by Mundruczó and his team — special mention to the dog handlers and trainers who helped orchestrate this strange spectacle, not to mention DoP Marcell Rév for the visceral dog's-eye-view camerawork. Yet while *White God* works as a parable for our times — where economic inequality has widened the gap between the rich and poor — its novelty value dilutes its core message. This is an entertaining, technically accomplished work, but unlike the 1982 Samuel Fuller race-relations thriller which the title references, its set-up ultimately proves distracting. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION. *A Hungarian social realist drama about a canine apocalypse. This we have to see.* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *Technically impressive but gimmicky to a fault.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *Woof.* **3**

The Woman in Black: Angel of Death

Directed by **TOM HARPER**
Starring **HELEN MCCRORY, JEREMY IRVINE, LEILAH DE MEZA**
Released **1 JANUARY**

Much of the curiosity engendered by James Watkins' serviceable slice of cod-Victorian kitsch, *The Woman in Black*, centred on the post-graduation casting of its franchise-free star, Daniel Radcliffe. With the newly bestubbled actor taking the lead, and a long-standing stalwart of cut-price West End ticket booths serving as its source material, it was of little surprise that the film enjoyed a modicum of success. Radcliffe may not have swerved the train that put paid to any further family gatherings — of the earthbound variety, at least — at the end of that film, but three years on, he's demonstrated a fleetness of foot in running for the hills in the face of its dire sequel.

While it remains difficult to champion Watkins' pedestrian direction, his workaday scares take on a Carpenterian rigour when held up against the flaccid miscalculations of his successor, Tom Harper. Which is a shame, given the promise suggested by his 2009 debut, *The Scouting Book for Boys*. A retreat into television since then is clearly evinced in his return to the big screen, the absence of DoP Robbie Ryan this time around keenly felt.

Yet it's not just the formal mishandling of even the most basic horror devices that sets *Angel of Death* up for a fall. Screenwriters Susan Hill and Jon Croker provide little that serves to enrich their infanticidal antagonist's mythology, a transposition of repetitive tropes to a Blitz-plagued 1941 serving only to furnish the film with one unfortunate metaphor. As a convoy of evacuee schoolchildren approach an airfield for a climactic set-piece, it's only on arrival and closer inspection that its fraudulent nature is revealed. Filled with fake planes and automated lights, it's a dummy site dolled-up to draw in unsuspecting German bombers. With all the genre signifiers in place, *Angel of Death* may at distance pass for the genuine article, but even for the most undemanding horror fan, it finally proves as bogus as its own Luftwaffe-luring fugazi. **MATT THRIFT**

ANTICIPATION. *No Radcliffe, no deal.* **2**

ENJOYMENT. *Oh dear.* **1**

IN RETROSPECT. *A dismally conceived and executed sequel.* **1**

REVIEWS

Nekromantik

Directed by
JÖRG BUTTGEREIT
Starring
BERND DAKTARI LORENZ
BEATRICE MANOWSKI
HARALD LUNDT

1988

Released **15 DEC**

DVD & Blu-ray

A very welcome revival of this notorious German film maudit from 1987, which attains a level of grungy seediness heretofore unplumbed by non-porno cinema. Shot on Super8, *Nekromantik* at times resembles an actual snuff movie (or what we'd imagine a snuff movie to look and feel like), while also channelling the ingenious early splatter films of Peter Jackson such as *Bad Taste*. Jörg Buttgereit's film is about Rob, a gangly young man in the employ of an agency whose job it is to dispose of the recently deceased. Collecting sundry human organs in specimen jars as spoils from his rounds, he one day decides to bring home a full, partially rotted corpse so he and his girlfriend Betty can spice up their sex lives. Though Betty, it transpires, prefers the corpse, leaving Rob to descend into a doom spiral of shame, sadness and delayed sexual gratification. Some may dismiss the film as nothing more than a grim succession of ultra-repellant provocations, with real footage of a rabbit being killed and skinned playing alongside a central storyline of deviant corporeal urges. But there's reason to believe that there's more to this film than sheer taboo-busting, as perhaps its most radical element is the way it presents the benign, even erotic side to necrophilia and the suggestion that love and romance are implicitly beautiful no matter how they are expressed. As with Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*, this film juxtaposes its most most controversial scenes with music that is rousing and melodic, and the piano refrain from the infamous *ménage à trois* sequence would arguable rank as the greatest horror theme of all time. This deluxe Arrow Films Blu-ray comes with all the context you could ask for, including lengthy interviews with Buttgereit and a documentary assessing the film's image over the years, plus the original soundtrack, which even on its own is amazing. **DAVID JENKINS**

Thief

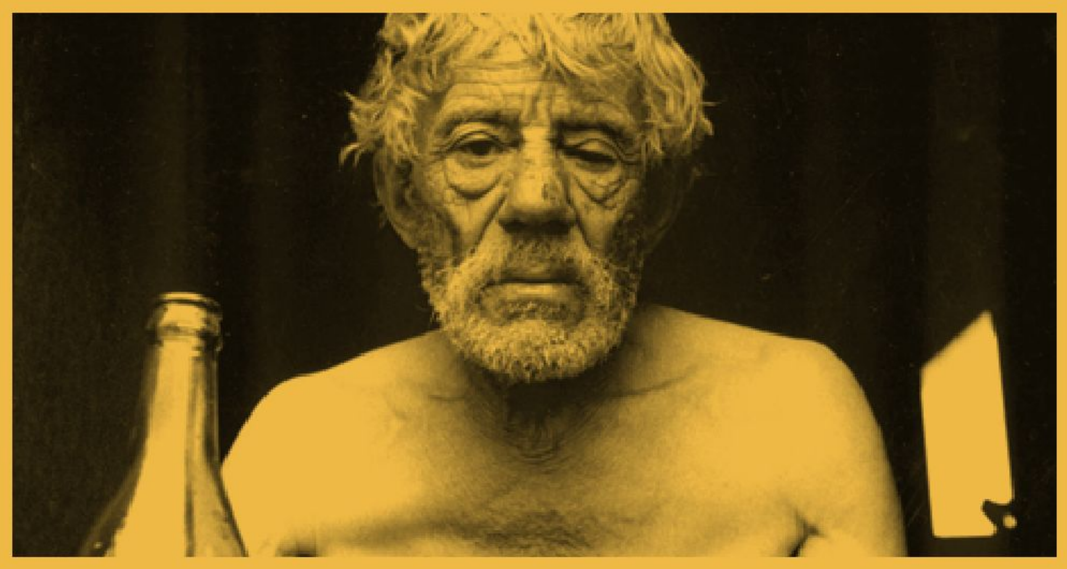
Directed by
MICHAEL MANN
Starring
JAMES CAAN
TUESDAY WELD
WILLIE NELSON

1981

Released **26 JAN**

Blu-ray

This bleak anti-capitalist fable about financial self-sufficiency and its inherent pros and cons is the directorial debut of Michael Mann (not including the made-for-TV movie, *The Jericho Mile*) and it's an assured and soulful first feature, to put it very lightly. It's also one of those movies where, even though it's James Caan's name up there in lights above the title, the real star of *Thief* is the the city of Chicago circa 1981, a location where the seething underbelly of private, organised corruption is visible on every street and boulevard. Though the plot of the film is not strictly focused on nocturnal activities, Mann builds this sense that when the sun goes down and the millions of little lights — street lamps, bulbs festooned over car lots, neon bar signs, car headlights — switch on, this is a different form of daylight, a public system that unknowingly helps criminals go about their business. The title could refer to two characters in the film: one is Caan's surly safe-cracker Frank who, along with a very small unit of hand-picked accomplices, is proving himself as a potentially major asset for those with connections in the stolen jewell trade; the other is Robert Prosky's Leo, an apparently benevolent crime lord who wants nothing more than to nurture Frank's talent and supply him with enough support and perks to make him accept a position a life partner-in-crime. Frank is a thief because he burgles jewels. Leo is a thief because he's taking Frank's independence from him. The irony of the film is that Leo is trying to formulate a conventional business set-up, whereby he's the shareholder and Frank is his employee, but Frank is unwilling and unable to accept the paradox of Leo having major sway in his life choices. This new Blu-ray edition is released by Arrow Films. **DAVID JENKINS**



Bad Timing

Directed by
NICOLAS ROEG
Starring
ART GARFUNKEL
THERESA RUSSELL
HARVEY KEITEL

1980

Released **26 JAN**

Blu-ray

"A sick film made by sick people and for sick people." Not the hair-tearing front-page proclamations of some Mary Whitehouse-like moral guardian, but the words of Rank, the distributors behind Nicolas Roeg's baroque, time-switching study of an abusive relationship. Though the words ring of standard hyperbolic outrage, they appear ill-placed, especially as *Bad Timing* is an extremely serious film which explores its subject without even a scintilla of fatuous provocation. The film sees two souls attempting to come to terms with the geographic dislocation of Cold War Europe and, despite their best efforts, are unable to make a meaningful romantic connection with one another. Art Garfunkel plays passive-aggressive psychology scholar Dr Alex Linden who meets cute with Theresa Russell's unstable Milena Flaherty when she begins eying him up at a wine soiree. They instigate an intense affair, though slowly Milena reveals herself as something of a wildcat, refusing to tie herself down to one man and summarily humiliating Alex in public spots. The title refers to a police testimony given by Alex at a point where Milena has overdosed on drugs and her life is slipping away — he recounts the events of that fateful night, though a detective played by Harvey Keitel, doesn't think the timings add up. "Sick" is most certainly an incorrect descriptor for this film, as it contains no more sex and violence than your average '80s art film. Though it remains a miraculous work, possible even Roeg's finest, with one scene in particular where we hear Alex and Milena's thoughts before they are uttered, standing as a testament to the director's commitment to creating cinema that is foremost a sensual experience. **DAVID JENKINS**

Pictures of the Old World

Directed by
DUSAN HANÁK

1972

Released **23 FEB**

DVD

The annual *LWLies* Award for Excellence in the Field of Cinematic Excavation goes to the SecondRun team for digging up this singular and shattering 1972 Czech documentary from director Dusan Hanák. At once life-affirming and ineffably melancholic, the film takes on the simple task of filming those members of the elderly and infirm scattered around an unnamed environ and having them answer questions about, not so much their lives, but the definitions of "life" they have forged from this privileged position of experience. The two directors who come to mind while watching *Pictures of the Old World* are Chris Marker and Pier Paolo Pasolini. The Marker link is due to Hanák's predilection for the surreal interlude, where he might use a still image of a face and disembodied sound rather than conventional talking head footage. This tactic not only toys with the veracity of testimonies — giving the impression that Hanák wants his film to speak for all old people rather than the specific sample he has chosen — but transforms the film as a whole from an anthropological document into a poem about time, decay and the idea of humans as machines which eventually break. The Pasolini reference is in the palpable empathy Hanák has for his subjects, never using them as figures of fun (even though they are often very funny) or as a reason to stray into the grotesque or the morbid. The way Pasolini filmed the faces of real people with all their supposed aesthetic defects as a way to question what we would coin as "beauty" is also adopted here. And while these people are extremely frail and have lived lives where the accoutrements of national welfare have seemingly bypassed them completely and the trials of their lives have meant that, say, having straight teeth is not top of the to-do list, these images only add to the film's sense of bracing existential gravity. Exceptional. **DAVID JENKINS**

My Winnipeg

Directed by
GUY MADDIN
Starring
DARCY FEHR
ANN SAVAGE
LOUIS NEGIN

2007

Released **20 JAN**

DVD & Blu-ray

The city of director Guy Maddin's birth and the subject of this dizzying docu-fantasia, Winnipeg has had the experimental filmmaker in its grasp his entire life, and this 2007 film finds him desperately trying to wriggle free. "What if I film my way out of here?", his avatar — a sleepless young man played by Darcy Fehr — thinks to himself in Maddin's voice. And so, in the frenzied monochromatic style that has defined the better part of the filmmaker's brilliant career, Maddin engineers a way to free himself from "the heinous power of family and city and escape once and for all." Like an insomniac Virgil who's really pissed at the NHL for greedily stealing away Winnipeg's hockey team (good news, Guy: the Jets are back!), Maddin's wonderful voice leads us ever deeper down this cold Manitoban slipstream. "The forks beneath the forks!" Deciding to rent his childhood home for a month and cast local actors to play his family (except for the role of his mother, who Maddin insists is playing herself), Maddin explores a past located halfway between memory and myth, the film never bothering to divine between the two. Some of the details, such as the department store that effectively owned the city before it went bankrupt, seem rooted in reality. Others, such as the iconic minefield of frozen horse heads that stick out from the river in which they died, seem less so. The film's best bits however are those that blend elements of both into something truer than true, and make it ineffably clear that home isn't a place so much as a state of mind. *My Winnipeg* is one of the best films of the '00s, and it's been unavailable for far too long. This new Criterion Collection edition, complete with four new Maddin cine-essays on various Winnipegiana, is an essential release. **DAVID EHRLICH**

The Palm Beach Story

Directed by
PRESTON STURGES
Starring
CLAUDETTE COLBERT
JOEL MCCREA
MARY ASTOR

1942

Released **20 JAN**

Blu-ray

Made in 1942 when Preston Sturges was at the peak of his powers, *The Palm Beach Story* may not share the iconic status of *Sullivan's Travels*, but what it lacks in self-reflexive soul-searching it more than makes up for in, well, everything else. *The Palm Beach Story* was way ahead of other screwball comedies of the time, its wry sense of humour dovetailing with current sensibilities more naturally than Sturges' other films. Even his usual tricks are garnished with a gentle sarcasm that wouldn't be out of place in a contemporary single-camera sitcom. Sturges had wanted to call the movie "Is Marriage Necessary?", a title nixed by the Hays Office because it allegedly implied the idea of sex (the idea that marriage is synonymous with sex is almost as funny as anything in the film, itself). All the same, *The Palm Beach Story* doesn't really do much to answer the question posed by its working title. "Is Marriage Valuable?" may have been a more accurate way of surmising Sturges' breathlessly compact screwball adventure. When the film begins — or, at least, when the prologue ends — Tom and Gerry Jeffers (Joel McCrea and Claudette Colbert) are five years into a marriage that may be reaching the end of its rope. She decides that it would be in his best interest if they split up; he disagrees. Next thing you know, Gerry is on board a train down to Florida with a kooky gun club and a billionaire bachelor who wants to be her next husband, and Tom is following in hot pursuit. While the Hays Office's concerns may have been off-base, a candid approach to sex is nevertheless at the heart of what makes the film so forward-thinking — as Gerry cautions Tom: "Sex always has something to do with it, darling". Ultimately, however, *The Palm Beach Story* has endured so well because it has such a hopeful and humanistic regard for the rest of the equation. **DAVID EHRLICH**

Union Station

Directed by
RUDOLPH MATÉ
Starring
WILLIAM HOLDEN
NANCY OLSON
BARRY FITZGERALD

1950

Released **23 DEC**

Blu-ray

A 1950 William Holden vehicle that seems backwards engineered from its eponymous location, *Union Station* is saddled by a half-assed kidnapping plot that limits the film's potential. On the other hand, Rudolph Maté's direction, which miraculously maintains a coherent sense of place despite the absurd circumstances of the production, is in and of itself enough to recommend Olive Films' new Blu-ray. It's clear from the first scene, in which Joyce Willecombe (Nancy Olson) is dropped off at a small-town train station, that the film was shot in California (and not, as the plot might suggest, in the deserts of Illinois). While on board the train into the city — whichever city that might be — Joyce spots a suspicious man carrying a gun, and, like any good citizen, says something when she sees something. When the train arrives at Union Station (which is played by the inimitable architecture of Los Angeles' Union Station!), the nervous woman meets with the head of the facility's house police squad, Lt.William Calhoun (William Holden). Together, they learn that Joyce's suspicions were well-founded, as Joyce gets word that her employer's blind daughter has been kidnapped. A mystery is afoot! Based on a Thomas Walsh novel that was set inside New York City's Grand Central Station, and cobbled together from footage that was shot in New York, Chicago, and California, Union Station is an emblem of editing magic. Maté's moody high-contrast compositions elevate this hodgepodge of public transport into a marvel of visual coherene, and Calhoun's team works with a compulsively watchable take-no-prisoners edge. But if every hard-nosed movie cop wants you to think that this is all just another day at the office for them, *Union Station*'s generic plot would add an unfortunate credence to Calhoun's claim. **DAVID EHRLICH**

La Ciénaga

Directed by
LUCRECIA MARTEL
Starring
MERCEDES MORÁN
GRACIELA BORGES
MARTÍN ADJEMIÁN

2001

Released **27 JAN**

DVD & Blu-ray

La Ciénaga wasted no time in announcing the arrival of a bold, fully-formed filmmaker in Lucrecia Martel. The film details how declining socio-economic fortunes and a paralysingly provincial mentality have lead a bourgeois clan to become the embodiment of what Martel has described as, "A society that lives vaguely hoping that nothing will ever change, and in terror of everything repeating itself indefinitely." These people are completely and irrevocably stuck — a storm is always threatening to displace them, yet it never touches down. In fact, it never even rains. It is almost as if the characters, usually gathered around the brackish waters of the pool that's been installed at the family estate, are living inside the eye of a hurricane — it's deceptively serene, but to step outside of their immediate environments seems unfathomable. Martel articulates how out of sync these people have become from the world by detaching the film's soundtracking with its corresponding imagery, a tactic that imbues the pointedly mundane setting with an extraordinary social tension, defiling spacial cohesion in favour of creating an impermeable pall of subliminal inertia and disquiet. Time stands still, waiting for something to shake it out of its stupor. It doesn't accompany the image, but exists independent of it, what we hear splintered apart from what we see, stimuli detached from each other in much the same way the adults who populate Martel's film are irreconcilably pulled apart, lost in their patterns. *La Ciénaga* has been recognised as a masterpiece of South American cinema since it's first release in 2001, but it isn't exactly a Marvel movie, and it's renown has been mostly confined to film schools and retrospectives. Criterion Collection's release isn't loaded with extras, but should nevertheless help Martel's debut find its rightful place in the canon. **DAVID EHRLICH**

Words by **KATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN** *Illustration by* **LAURÈNE BOGLIO**

The Female Gaze at IDFA

FEATURE

As part of a debate surrounding the notion of the female gaze in cinema, IDFA director, Ally Derks posed the question: does a glass ceiling exist in the documentary industry and how are women represented in documentaries? Over a 10-year period, only 33.2 per cent of festival films were directed by women and only once has a woman won the top prize: Danish director Pernille Rose Grønkjaer for her film *The Monastery — Mr Vig & the Nun*. In light of this startling information, this year's IDFA invited 15 female documentary filmmakers to compile a themed programme.

In making her 2002 work *Filming Desire — A Journey Through Women's Film*, Belgian director Marie Mandy collected together the views of some celebrated female filmmakers — including Jeanne Labrune and Agnès Varda — on the meaning of desire. It's a response to an incident in 2000 when a male journalist suggested he could tell that the film *Pardon Cupidon* was made by a woman because of the way the sex scenes were presented. Though Mandy is clear to point out that the notion of a generic female voice doesn't actually exist, she did want to explore the way women are represented by other women in film and how that differs from the male perspective. The manner in which the female form is presented in film remains a contentious issue, and Agnès Varda puts forward the view that male directors tend to cut the body up, with bums and breasts as the focus, whereas in her work, she likes to show the whole figure. Catherine Breillat explains, "sex is a part of our identity," which affirms why there's a real need to balance out gender depiction in film. The work of (another) Belgian director, Chantal Akerman (who is sadly missing from this doc), points to an imbalance, and the lesbian sex scene in her 1976 feature *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* makes for a fascinating contrast to those in Abdellatif Kerchiche's *Blue is the Warmest Colour*.

All of the women in *Filming Desire* speak of the freedom to explore their bodies on film and their need to shift the visual emphasis away from a strictly male point-of-view. However, over a similar time period when these female filmmakers were finding their voices, women in Iran were having their rights severely curtailed simply because of their gender. The poignant and urgent *Profession: Documentarist* presents personal stories from seven Iranian female filmmakers who chart the impact of the 1979 Islamic revolution on their way of life. This courageous effort highlights exactly why the female gaze is essential in documentary.

The great British documentary director, Kim Longinotto, presented the mesmerising *Love is All: 100 Years of Love & Courtship*, which highlights 1930s male filmmakers who made a point of featuring oppressed female characters standing up for themselves against rigid conservative strictures for such simple pleasures as sex before marriage. Longinotto weaves together material which is at once uplifting and provocative: She creates clever contrasts by placing a public service announcement from 1926 named *Hints to the Ladies of Jiu Jitsu*, which suggest women empower themselves via self-defence and the fear mongering, next to *Don't be Like Brenda* from 1973, which is a shocking and regressive depiction of sexist attitudes which came as vicious backlash to the feminist movement.

Four of the 15 filmmakers chose a Varda film for inclusion in this strand. The playful autobiographical essay *The Beaches of Agnès* from 2008, illustrates exactly why there is such high regard for "the true founder of Nouvelle Vague," as Mandy suggests in her film. Varda's body of work is bold, reflexive and unique, her feminist stance is forthright and intelligent, and her persona creative and mischievous. The female voice in documentary film is pleasingly varied, but the real issue raised at IDFA as part of the female gaze theme was the question of how much it is valued

Words by **DEMETRIOS MATHEOU** *Illustration by* **LAURÈNE BOGLIO**

John Ford at the Viennale

"My Name is John Ford and I make westerns." Ford's famous assertion was made in the heat of the moment, speaking out against Cecil B DeMille's McCarthyite witch-hunting during a meeting of the Directors Guild of America. But it's stuck, with its charmingly limited description of a career that spanned 50 years, 124 films and all genres. When critics wish to counter, they tend to turn to the war films (features and wartime propaganda documentaries), or the classic depression-era drama such as 1940's *The Grapes of Wrath* and its companion piece for across the pond, 1941's *How Green Was My Valley*, or even his roistering romantic comedy *The Quiet Man*, with which he and Wayne most notably strayed from action territory.

We rarely hear of Ford's out-and-out comedies. Hence my delight when I dipped into the recent, revelatory Ford retrospective in Vienna, a partnership between the Viennale and the Vienna Filmmuseum that included 45 films spanning his career, from silents and early talkies through to his last feature, *7 Women*, from 1966. A handful of films shed new light on the director, drawing him surprisingly close to the work of contemporaries such as Howard Hawks, Frank Capra and Preston Sturges whose facility with comedy is much better known. One could never quite call Ford a screwball director; his energy is more slapstick. But when these films work, they're a hoot.

In 1935, five years before *His Girl Friday*, Ford's *The Whole Town's Talking* offered its own take on cynicism in the press and incompetence in the law while focusing on an Ordinary Joe caught in the middle of the two. While, admittedly, it can't touch the Hawks, it's very funny, with a deliciously twisty plot of mistaken identity and a fabulous dual performance by Edward G Robinson — as a meek clerk and a crime boss — that at once showcases and subverts his image as crime kingpin Little Caesar. That year Ford also made *Steamboat Round the Bend*, his third film with the popular vaudevillian Will Rogers who plays a Mississippi chancer touring the river with his Pocahontas's all-purpose remedy and who reveals his moral fibre when his nephew faces the noose. While the film takes an age to get going (Ford bemoaned studio interference for excising the comedy), it builds a head of steam in a climactic river race sequence that is beautifully shot, inventive and uproariously madcap.

The character of these films is less surprising given the period in which they were made, and the people who wrote them. Robert Riskin, who co-scripted *The Whole Town's Talking*, the year before won an Oscar for romcom lodestone, *It Happened One Night*, while being nominated for three further Capra collaborations. *Steamboat* scribe Dudley Nichols had already won an Oscar for Ford's *The Informer*, but would later co-write Hawks's *Bringing Up Baby*. It's interesting to see Ford imbibe the influence of these writers, the rat-a-tat dialogue and barely controlled chaos, while not being subsumed by it; Fordian themes concerning the frontier, friendship and loyalty are very much present in *Steamboat*, for example.

One can see the same dialogue in *When Willie Comes Marching Home*. At first glance this is a typical paean to wartime patriotism, as its hero Bill Kluggs (Dan Dailey) becomes the first man to enlist in his small town after Pearl Harbour. But as Kluggs fails to get off the training base outside town — and can't resist returning home for his mother's cooking — the film becomes something else altogether. An unmistakeable echo of Sturgess' *Hail the Conquering Hero* is underlined by the presence of Sturgess regular William Demarest; as with Sturgess, a personal dilemma leads to irresistible anarchy.

The poster for the retrospective portrays the ageing Ford as a St Bernard with an eye patch, a face we might imagine sun-dried under the Monument Valley sun. Yet the selection allowed the softer, comedic, endearingly eccentric side of the director to enjoy a little sun of its own

Words by **ADAM LEE DAVIES**

Hawks

DIRECTED BY
Robert Ellis Miller

STARRING
Timothy Dalton, Anthony Edwards, Janet McTeer

TRAILERS
The Bride Wore Tartan, Ineligible Receiver: The Buddy Frakes Story, Clandestine Entourage, The Lobsterman's Letter

CHERRYPICK
"You mustn't begrudge him his little pleasures — that's The Last Post he's blowing on that ailing sphincter..."

TIMOTHY DALTON · ANTHONY EDWARDS
HAWKS
They found a funny way of looking at life... just when they needed it most.
5
TIMOTHY DALTON AND ANTHONY EDWARDS
ROBERT ELLIS MILLER FILM
"HAWKS"

TAGLINE
'They Soared Above the Ordinary'

1988

FEATURE

The late '80s and early '90s were a cinematic boomtime for the terminally ill, the mentally out-to-brunch, the tastefully deformed and anyone with a soft-pedaled, actorly take on retrograde amnesia or autism. The Academy Awards people lapped it all up with a spoon — possibly because the average voter was of an age that death, dilapidation and forgetfulness were companions they were keen not to antagonise. Gilt-edged Kleenexers *Terms of Endearment*, *Rain Man* and *Awakenings* had 'em blubbing in the aisles and were prescribed a steady course of Oscar glory for their trouble.

1988's *Hawks* finds the Welsh James Bond (Timothy Dalton) and Goose from *Top Gun* (Anthony Edwards) as a couple of incurably wacky cancer patients who take leave of Death's waiting room by jacking an ambulance from Charing Cross Hospital and ticking off a pyjama-clad bucket list filled to the sweary brim with kamikaze sex-tourism, service-station heroics and jingoistic chauvinism. Their coarse and immortal goal is a legendarily-obscene five-storey knocking-shop in Amsterdam's red light district where they will attempt to elude oblivion's flaccid embrace just long enough to get their wilting hedges trimmed one last time. A long the way they meet two female English hitchhikers who they summarily treat like migrant fornication caddies for the duration of a foul-mouthed, bittersweet cross-channel road-trip sex-farce cancer-com based on an original idea by Barry Gibb of high-harmony disco kings, the BeeGees.

Could *Hawks* have already bitten off more than it can chew? Not really, as the film leaves most of those threads twisting in the wind and gets busy finding intricate ways to mask its virulent strain of indiscriminate misogyny with grating bouts of Tourettic self-pity. Indeed, why even continue to pretend? As the final curtain falls, it reveals a harsh but obvious truth to these men: that women are all (dis)posable sex bags whose sole defining traits are virginity, whorishness and pregnancy, and who all carry racy lingerie in their handbags that they are eager to slip into at a moment's notice.

Despite a production budget that would look to consist of a handful of cut-out-and-keep News of the World 'Booze Crooze' tokens and enough spare guilders for a night in a Dutch travel lodge, our plucky heroes finally reach their dirty destination where they ditch their English camp followers and spend an afternoon scoffing chips 'n' mayo and laughing in the tired faces/vaginas of a series of superannuated Benelux prossies. Is it fear of the big beyond that's making them act like odious, shrieking cocks, or the fact that in previous lives they were (respectively) a lawyer and a quarterback who were almost certainly entitled, grandstanding hard-ons from the get-go? No, these fellows are not raging against the dying of the light, merely making loud, annoying tits of themselves while God's eternal glass-collectors put the chairs on the tables and empty out the ashtrays as the rest of us shuffle past mouthing the words, "You poor, silly twats..."

We every one of us die, and life will cheat us all. No doubt. But when you stare into that last abyss, would you prefer to be confronted with an unending eternity of bible-black nothingness stretching out across every dimension? Or James Bond in a red clown-nose and wolfen leer bellowing scorched-earth sexual bon mots into your face for 80 minutes? It's a tough call

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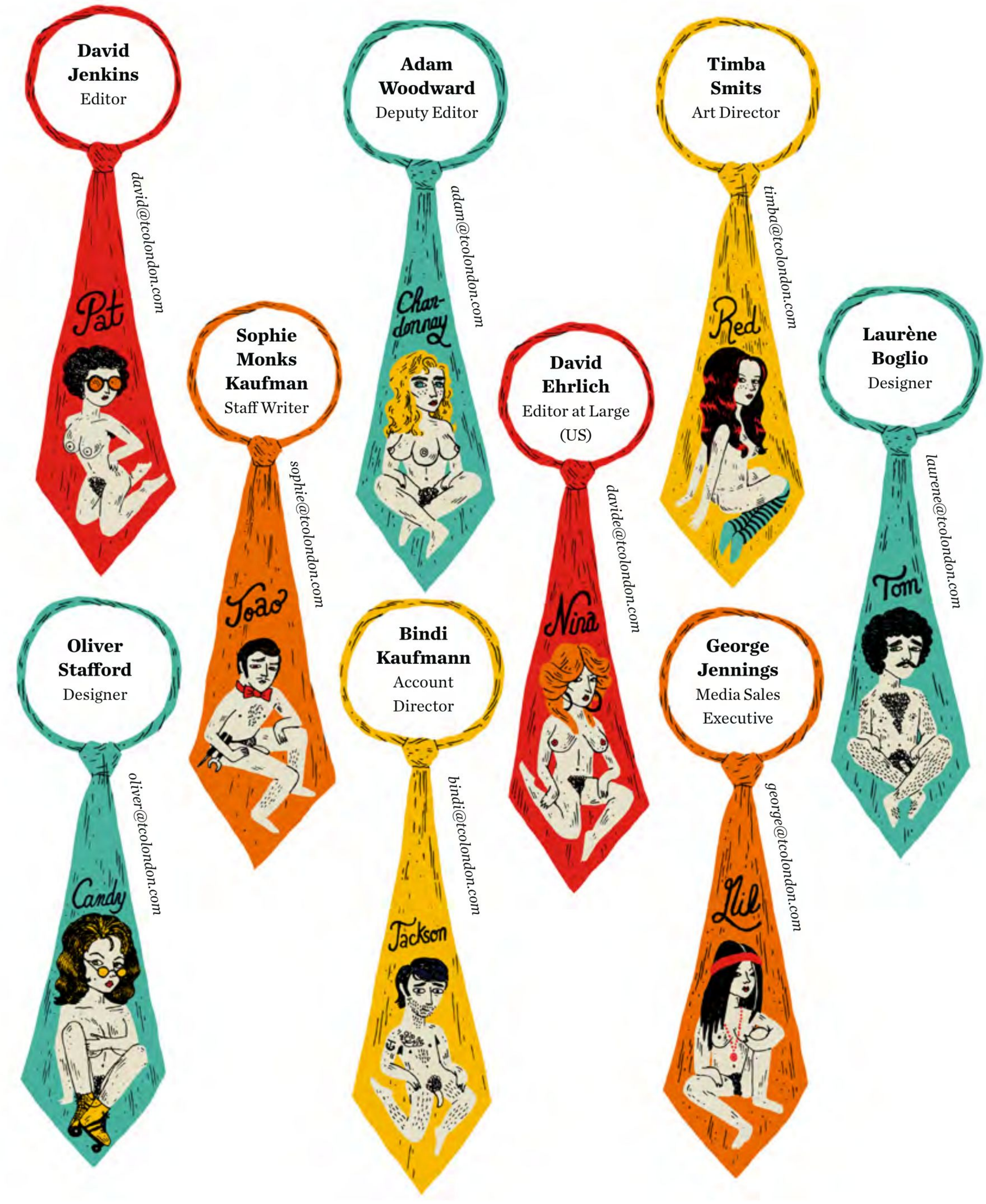

Words, pictures, thanks...

Mark Asch, Chris Blohm, Jordan Cronk, Adam Lee Davies, Paul Fairclough, Nicholas John Frith, Jacques Gites, Wally Hammond, Simran Hans, Glenn Heath Jr, Trevor Johnston, Charlie Lyne, Demetrios Matheou, Katherine McLaughlin, Adam Nayman, Vadim Rizov, Emma Simmonds, Riikka Sormunen, Matt Thrift, Keith Uhlich, James Wilson

Published by
The Church of London Publishing
71a Leonard Street
London EC2A 4QS
+44 (0) 207 7293675
tcolondon.com

Distributed by
COMAG Specialist
Tavistock Works
Tavistock Road, West Drayton
Middlesex UB7 7QX
andy.hounslow@comag.co.uk

Cover illustration by
Timba Smits

The articles appearing within this publication reflect the opinions and attitudes of their respective authors and not necessarily those of the publishers or editorial team.
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LWLies is published six times a year.
-
ISSN 1745-9168

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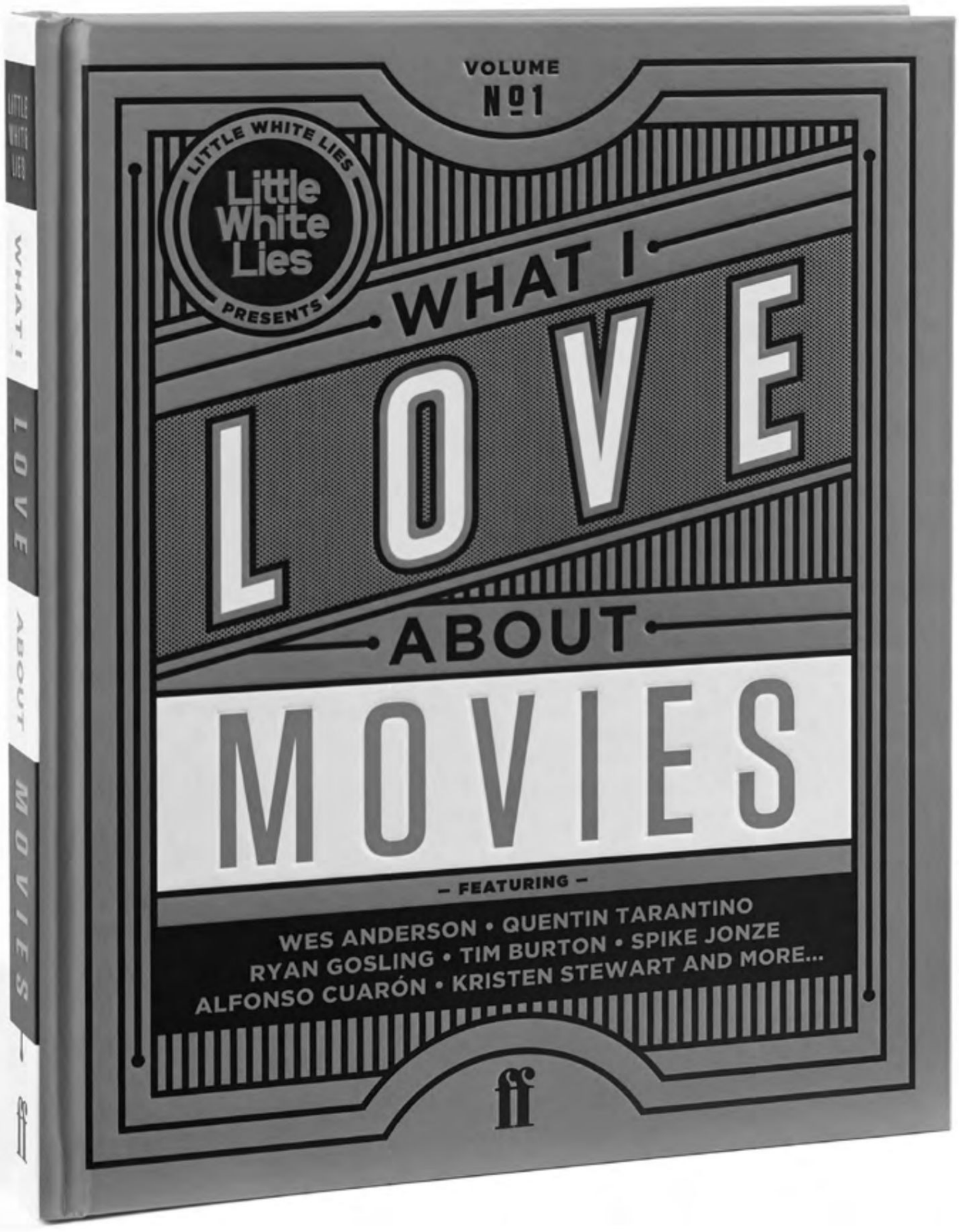

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PICK A CARD

BUSTED BY BIGFOOT

LOSE A TURN

A CRAZY NYMPHOMANIAC TRASHES YOUR APARTMENT...

GO BACK 2 SPACES

PICK A CARD

MAN, YOU GET KNOCKED OUT COLD IN A MASSAGE PARLOUR

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MOVE AHEAD 2 SPACES

1
2
3
4
5
6
MISS YOUR TURN
SPIN THE DOOBIE
CONTROL PANEL
— SPIN THE DOOBIE — WHEN IT STOPS, MOVE YOUR PLAYING PIECE TO THE CORRESPONDING POSITION. IF YOUR SPIN LANDS ON 'MISS YOUR TURN' THEN THE SPINNER MOVES TO THE NEXT PLAYER.
MISS YOUR TURN

Start

PLACE YOUR PLAYING PIECE HERE

BUSTED BY BIGFOOT

LOSE A TURN

YOU GET SPUN OUT, MAN. GO DIRECTLY TO THE LOONY BIN

GO BACK 4 SPACES

Smoke a Doobie

ROLL AGAIN

PICK A CARD

GNARLY MAN. YOU SMOKE A CRACK-LACED JOINT...

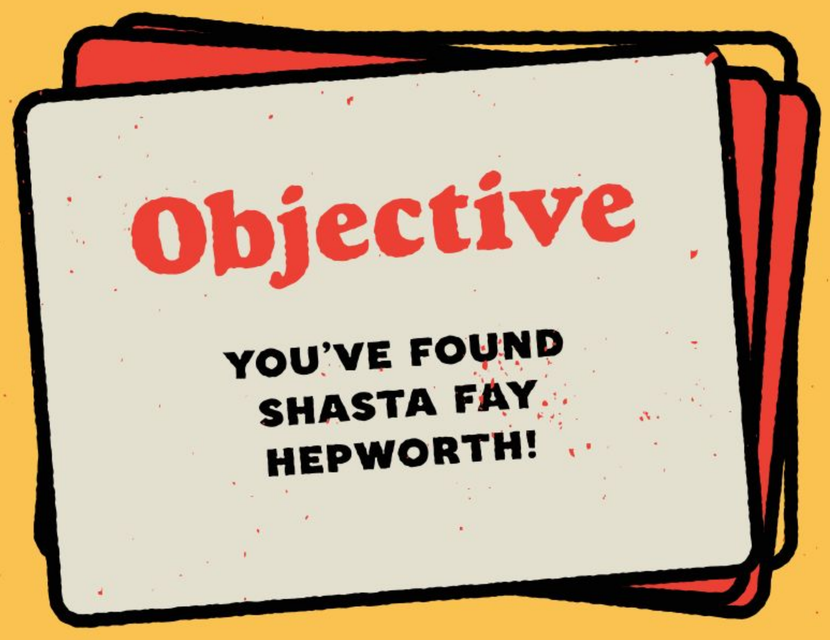
GO BACK TO THE START

BUSTED BY BIGFOOT
LOSE A TURN

YOU STRIKE IT BIG IN AN OFF-STRIP CASINO BETTING ON THE NEWS

MOVE AHEAD 4 SPACES

OBJECTIVES CARDS



PICK A CARD

Smoke a Doobie

ROLL AGAIN

"DOPER'S MEMORY" GETS THE BETTER OF YOU SON

MISS A TURN

YOU FIND SOME COUNTERFEIT NIXON BRANDED DOLLAR BILLS

MOVE AHEAD 2 SPACES

PICK A CARD

BUSTED BY BIGFOOT
LOSE A TURN

THE GAME OF Inherent Vice

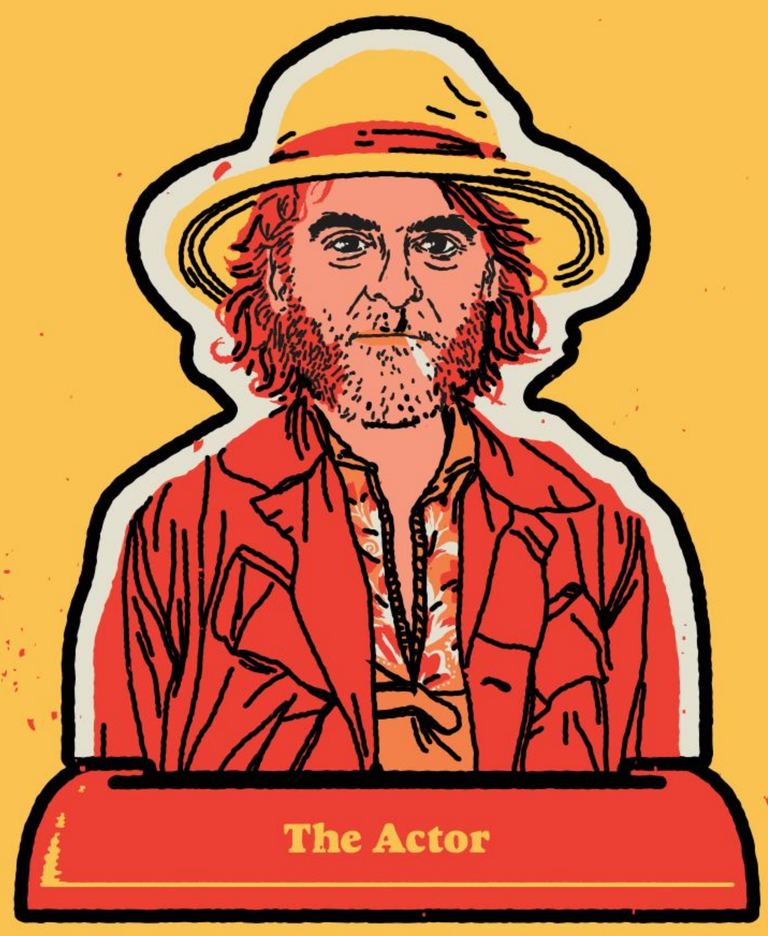
INSTRUCTIONS

FOR UP TO 4 PLAYERS

– CHOOSE ONE OF FOUR CHARACTERS TO PLAY THE GAME WITH. THESE ARE: PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON "THE DIRECTOR", PHOENIX "THE ACTOR", PYNCHON "THE WRITER", OR SHELTON "THE CARTOONIST"
– PLAYERS TAKE IT IN TURNS TO SPIN THE DOOBIE, MOVING THE CORRESPONDING NUMBER OF SPACES ALONG THE BOARD.
– EACH PLAYER MUST COMPLETE ALL FOUR KEY OBJECTIVES. THE FIRST PLAYER TO DO SO WINS THE GAME.

— KEY OBJECTIVES —

– FIND SHASTA FAY HEPWORTH
– GET ONTO THE GOLDEN FANG (PIRATE SHIP HOLDING CONTRABAND)
– FIND MICKEY WOLFMAN (EVIL PROPERTY DEVELOPER WITH FAR-RIGHT CONNECTIONS)
– REUNITE "DEAD" SAX PLAYER COY HARLINGEN WITH HIS FAMILY



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★★★★★
TIM ROBEY, DAILY TELEGRAPH

DAVID OYELOWO

SELMA

TOM WILKINSON
CARMEN EJOGO
WITH TIM ROTH
AND OPRAH WINFREY

ONE DREAM CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

IN CINEMAS 6TH FEBRUARY

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